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Effective Parent-Child Communication

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Dealing with Feelings




Common Conversations

- Child: "I don't know if I want to go to college."
 - Parent: "Don't be ridiculous. Of course you're going to college."
 - Child: "Why do I always have to take out the garbage?"
 - Parent: "Stop complaining."
 - Child: "I'm so worried."
 - Parent: "Don't be worried. You don't have to be worried."
 - Child: "I hate distance learning."
 - Parent: "No you don't, you love school!"
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Invalidating Feelings

- Child says she's upset. Parent says:
 - She isn't
 - She shouldn't be
 - She's overreacting
 - She has a bad attitude
 - She's being manipulative
 - It's silly to feel this way
 - Invalidating feelings fails to teach children to:
 - Label their private experiences
 - Trust their private experiences as valid
 - Regulate emotion or tolerate distress
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Common Themes

- When talking to their children, parents tend to:
 - Dismiss their feelings
 - Criticize their judgment
 - Give unsolicited advice
 - It's natural for parents to push away painful feelings and impose adult logic. We want to show our kids the "right" way to feel.
 - It's our acceptance of uncomfortable feelings that makes it easier for our kids to cope with them.
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Validation


- Validation communicates that your child's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors *make sense in context*, even if they are maladaptive
 - Empathy conveys that you understand how your child feels
 - Validation includes empathy, and also conveys how it makes sense that your child feels (or thinks/acts) that way
- Resist the temptation to change unpleasant feelings right away
 - E.g., Child cries, says she's embarrassed about crying.
 - Invalidating response: "Don't cry. You don't have to be embarrassed."
 - Validating response: "I can see why you would feel embarrassed, AND, I want you to know that this is a safe space."
- Validation Script: "I can see why you [feel, think, acted] this way, because of ____."

How Validation is Useful

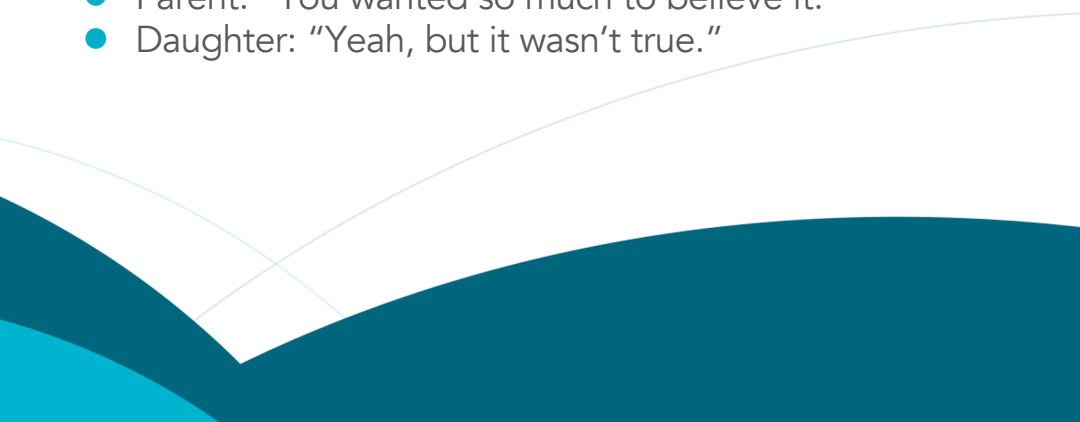
- Counteracts notion that your child's thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors are all wrong
- Helps kids learn to validate themselves
- Makes change efforts easier to tolerate
 - Validation is often a prerequisite for change




Dismissing Feelings vs. **Validating Feelings**

- Parent: "Why are you crying?"
 - Daughter: "I don't want to talk about it."
 - Parent: "You'll feel better if you talk about it."
 - Daughter: "Scott dumped me."
 - Parent: "He what?! Well good riddance. I never liked him."
 - Daughter: "I did."
 - Parent: "Forget about him. You'll have plenty of other boyfriends."
 - Daughter: "I can't forget about him. I don't want to forget about him."
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Dismissing Feelings vs. *Validating Feelings*

- Parent: "It looks like something's making you unhappy."
 - Daughter: "Scott dumped me."
 - Parent: "No wonder you're so upset."
 - Daughter: "I should have seen it coming. He was always flirting with other girls."
 - Parent: "That could hurt."
 - Daughter: "It did. But I kept telling myself I was the one he really liked."
 - Parent: "You wanted so much to believe it."
 - Daughter: "Yeah, but it wasn't true."
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Ignoring Feelings vs. **Acknowledging Feelings**

- Child: "Oh no! I just realized my report is due tomorrow!"
 - Parent: "Don't tell me you still haven't finished it!"
 - Child: "I thought I had till Friday."
 - Parent: "That's what happens when you don't plan ahead."
 - Child: "But..."
 - Parent: "No buts about it. Just sit down and do it now."
 - Child: "Get off my back!"
 - Parent: "Don't talk to me like that!"
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Ignoring Feelings vs. *Acknowledging Feelings*

- Child: "Oh no! I just realized my report is due tomorrow!"
 - Parent: "Oh."
 - Child: "I haven't even started it."
 - Parent: "Mmm."
 - Child: "I was going to hang out with my friends tonight."
 - Parent: "I'm sorry. That's disappointing."
 - Child: "This teacher is super strict. If I turn it in late, she won't accept it."
 - Parent: "That sounds stressful."
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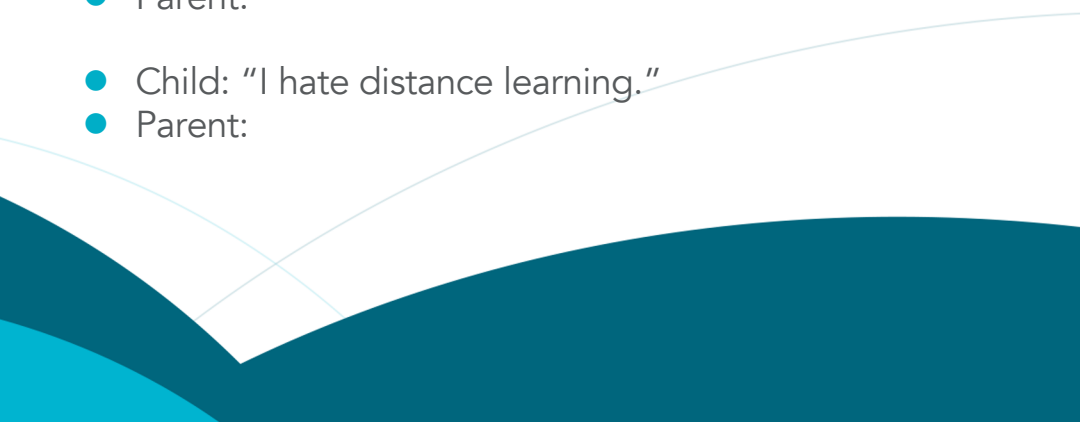
Going Against Your Better Judgment

- Child: "I want to play soccer with my friends tomorrow. My ankle doesn't hurt anymore."
 - Parent: "It's still swollen. The doctor said no soccer for two weeks."
 - Child: "But all my friends will be there! I promise I'll be careful!"
 - Parent: "Well... if you're really careful and take it easy."
 - Child: "Thanks, you're the best!"
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Accept Feelings as You Redirect Behavior

- Child: "I want to play soccer with my friends tomorrow. My ankle doesn't hurt anymore."
 - Parent: "I wish I could say yes, but it's still swollen and the doctor said no soccer for two weeks."
 - Child: "But all my friends will be there!"
 - Parent: "And you're stuck in the house. That's rough."
 - Child: "I didn't get to play last week either!"
 - Parent: "You'll be so glad when that ankle is healed. Right now, doctor's orders are to rest it as much as possible."
 - Child: "This sucks."
 - Parent: "I know."
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Revisiting the Conversations

- Child: "I don't know if I want to go to college."
 - Parent:
 - Child: "Why do I always have to take out the garbage?"
 - Parent:
 - Child: "I'm so worried."
 - Parent:
 - Child: "I hate distance learning."
 - Parent:
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Feelings: Key Points

- You have a better chance of being heard if you start by letting your kids know they've been heard.
 - Identify thoughts and feelings.
 - Acknowledge and validate feelings.
 - Accept feelings as you redirect behavior.

Engaging Cooperation




"Making Sure"

- What are the things you feel you need to "make sure" your child does in the course of a day?
 - Don't fall back to sleep after the alarm goes off
 - Don't skip breakfast
 - Don't wear the same clothes three days in a row
 - Start homework on time
 - Practice piano
 - Don't stay on their phone all night


Typical Strategies for Getting Kids to Comply

- Blaming and accusing
 - Threats
 - Orders
 - Lectures and moralizing
 - Warnings
 - Martyrdom
 - Comparisons
 - Sarcasm
 - Prophecy
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Strategies to Engage Cooperation

- **Instead of giving orders, describe the problem**
 - Orders create resentment and resistance
 - By describing the problem, we invite our kids to become part of the solution
 - **Instead of attacking, describe what you feel**
 - When we're angry, we sometimes lash out at our kids with words that can attack or demean them. The result? They wither withdraw or counterattack.
 - When we describe what we feel, it's easier for kids to hear us and respond helpfully
 - **Instead of blaming, give information**
 - When kids are accused, they become defensive
 - When they're given information, simply and respectfully, they're more likely to assume responsibility for what needs to be done
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Strategies to Engage Cooperation

- Instead of threats or orders, offer a choice
 - Many kids react to threats with defiance or sullen compliance
 - Substitute a choice that meets our needs and theirs
 - Instead of a long lecture, say it in a word
 - Kids tend to tune out long lectures
 - Short reminders focus their attention
 - Instead of pointing out what's wrong, state your values/expectations
 - Kids react to criticism by defending their behavior
 - When you state your expectations clearly and respectfully, kids are more likely to listen
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To Punish or Not to Punish



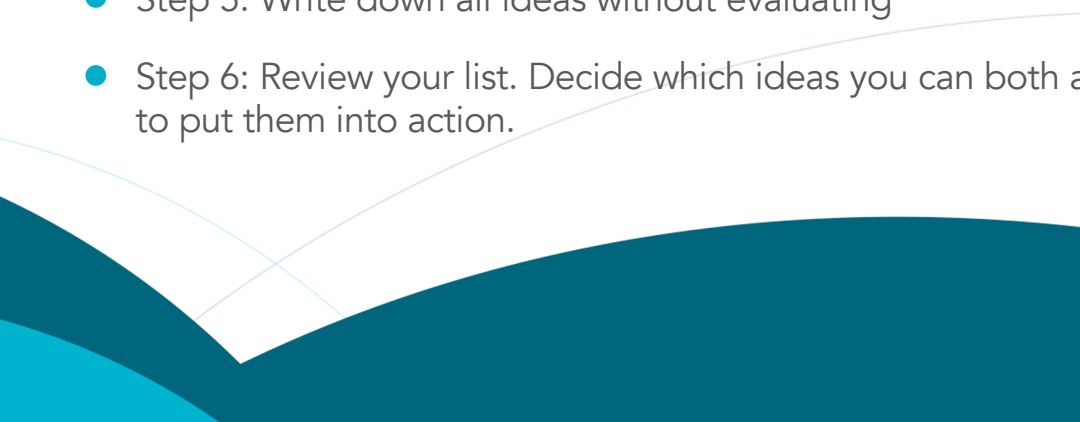
Alternatives to Punishment

- Step 1: State your feelings
 - Step 2: State your expectations
 - Step 3: Show how to make amends
 - Step 4: Offer a choice
 - Step 5: Take action
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Working Through Problems Together



Collaborative Problem Solving

- Step 1: Invite your child to give their point of view
 - Step 2: Empathize and validate
 - Step 3: State your perspective, and your concerns
 - Step 4: Invite your child to brainstorm with you
 - Step 5: Write down all ideas without evaluating
 - Step 6: Review your list. Decide which ideas you can both agree to, and how to put them into action.
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