

A Short Parenting Tip

Some Attitudes Run Pretty Deep

An attitude tune-up ultimately addresses how children think and what they believe. Attitudes are a mindset. They reflect how we process information and experiences. When an actor dressed in a white lab coat tells you that one particular toothpaste is the best because it fights cavities, you may believe him and have a positive attitude toward that toothpaste, even though all toothpaste fights cavities.

When a friend tells your teenage daughter that her shoes are out of style, you may try to convince her otherwise by showing her the latest catalogs, but she will choose whom she wishes to believe and develop an attitude toward the shoes accordingly.

Attitudes are based on information and experience. To help your children develop appropriate attitudes, start by identifying the thinking errors that may be leading to a bad attitude. Here are a few:

"Work is a disruption to my fun in life."

"I should be able to do what I want to do."

"My parents shouldn't be correcting me for this kind of thing."

"My parents are too strict."

"My brother has problems too but he never gets in trouble."

Take time to ask questions about your child's bad attitude to discover what thinking error may lie behind it. Dialogue with your child to get at some of those hidden issues. Be careful if the discussion becomes emotionally charged. Although meanness should be a signal that the conversation needs a break, don't be overly put off by a child's intensity.

When your child speaks strongly, you may gain insight into some underlying beliefs. Children sometimes say things in anger that they wouldn't normally say. These statements are clues to thinking errors. You don't want to try to reason with your child when he's angry, but listen and then you'll be able to discuss the issues later. After a break, come back with questions, suggestions, and statements of right thinking as you continue to dialogue.

The goal is to help children think rightly and that takes time. Questions like "Why do you think that's unfair?" Or, "Tell me how I could have handled it differently" can often help kids get started. Your persistence will pay off as you try to help replace the lies or immaturity with healthy statements that they can say to themselves.

For more information on changing attitudes and adjusting what children believe check out the brand new workbooks and CDs called "Parenting is Heart Work." Two of those 36-page manuals and their accompanying 45 minute CDs delve into this very issue with practical solutions that will provide lasting change not just surface compliance in children.