

How to be one step ahead of your kids!

I don't know if you ever feel like you are playing catch up as a parent. As in, they do something inappropriate or misbehave and now you are stuck quickly trying to think about how to deal with this situation. And I often wasn't sure what to do. Lay down the law or offer grace? And I'm sure the boys saw my hesitation and deer in the headlights look. And when they sense weakness....watch out! This was also often something I felt overwhelmed about and frustrated. So many times in my head and I think out loud I would say things like, "Great, now I have to deal with..., seriously I don't have time or energy for this!" So this morning I want to give you a few basic things to try to help you stay one step ahead of your kids.

1. Tell your kids the plan and rules ahead of time.

-now some of your kids will be ok with "we're going to run some errands this morning" and that will be enough. Others of you will need to be more detailed and explain how many stops you will be making and what you will be getting at each stop and where you will park at each stop. You get the idea, some kids need more info, some need less. But tell them the plan and then the rules.

-Preparing yourself and your kid to go out is sometimes half the battle. On the way to anyone's house to play or eat supper, or heading to an event, we always have a chat with the boys about our expectations. Try if you can to say these in a positive way. Our grocery shopping talks often go like this: "So in the grocery store I need you to keep your hands to yourself. If you have trouble with that, put them in your pockets. I also need you to walk nicely beside the cart and not wrestle with your brother." I would try to keep things positive but the boys were often very quick to fill in all the don'ts. Don't take things off the shelves, don't ask for anything, don't punch or wrestle with each other. Then I would address the inevitable cookie question. If you can listen and obey while I get the fruits and vegetables, then you can have a cookie to eat while I finish the shopping.

-Lay out your expectations for your children so that they know what behaviour is expected. You will need to do this over and over and over again! Keep the rules short and sweet and make them repeat! So now that your child knows the deal, do you?

2. Have a plan (of what you will discipline and how and then be consistent)

Have you thought about what you are going to do if they act up? Do you have a plan in your head? Because if you don't, it usually doesn't end up well. It often looks like empty threats or drastic disciplinary measures that we often regret. But if we have a plan, we will be that much better off to handle things calmly and coolly with our dignity intact.

3. Keep your child in mind

-Remember our goal is to teach them, train them. What's the best way to do that? Stern, angry face? Harsh tone? How would we respond to that?

-think about what is going on in your child too in that moment. Try to put yourself in their shoes before you discipline. Are they overwhelmed and over stimulated, over tired or overly hungry? If so, they are going to go into overwhelm much quicker. That means they will have a tougher time acting the way they should, controlling their emotions and listening to suggestions to stop. So the bad behaviour can often be a sign that there is just too much going on and they don't know how to handle it. We need to realize that and step in to help them. Then disciplining looks different if we are trying to help them in their overwhelm rather than simply disciplining their bad behaviour.

-can you give your child choices and involve them in the learning? Obviously this is for toddlers and older. But even two year olds like to choose which pair of shoes to wear. Sometimes even the simple act of asking whether they want to hold your right hand or left hand can jolt their brain enough to choose rather than dig in their heels.

Some thoughts for disciplining your child in public:

- Try as much as possible not to do it in public. What I mean by that is, remove yourself and your child from the situation and deal with things in private. Go to your car if you have to, use a bathroom at a friend's house, duck behind a tree so you can just be the two of you.

- Get down to their level and use quiet and calm tones. They are probably in overwhelm right now so you need to engage them and get them back into the green zone. The best way to do that is by looking them in the eye and talking calmly and slowly. Sometimes I find it even helps to take some deep breaths before talking. You may find your kids might slow down their breathing too.

- Stick to your plan or to your word in the moment. If you said you were going to leave if they did _____ again, then you need to pack up and leave. Unfortunately disciplining in public is extremely inconvenient. The good part though about being consistent and sticking to your word is that once you follow through a few times your kids believe you and then later on you just need to mention it and the behaviour can change because they know you will do what you said.

HOW TO BE ONE STEP AHEAD OF YOUR KIDS!

1. Tell your kids the plan and rules ahead of time

2. Have a plan

-What are you going to discipline for? How will you do it? Be consistent!

3. Keep your child in mind

Putting it into practice:

Think of a fairly common thing that happens requiring discipline on your part. Maybe your child hits other kids or screams when you don't buy them things. Now think about:

- Can I role play this with my child to help them understand and practice good reactions? What expectations do I want to communicate to them ahead of time?

- What's my plan for when they do this again? (for example, if your child is under the age of 5 and they hit someone, they will have to sit with you for 5 or 10 minutes)

Now take time to pray about this particular situation, Jesus wants to help you! Ask for wisdom, calm in the moment, even pray your child stops doing that thing.