

## Connect and Redirect

How do you typically respond to your kids or the kids at Selah when they're upset? Do you go with the logical, facts and solutions response?

There's nothing to be afraid of...

It's not a big deal that the glue won't stick. We'll just tape it on.

There's no reason to cry. Losing is part of the game.

There's nothing really wrong with the logical, left-brain approach – except that it rarely works when your child is upset. Left – brain logic almost never works when your child is in the middle of a right-brain meltdown.

Maybe some of you are more right brain when your kids are upset and you do respond to the emotion rather than just trying to talk them out of it. But the danger with right-brain only responses from us parents is that we can sometimes overload their system with more emotion. So they leave for school and they are so sad to go and so we are sad with them but we actually make it worse for them because we escalate their emotions rather than being a safe sounding board that helps them calm down.

So a quick review of left and right brain...

- The left side is logical, literal, linguistic (likes words) and linear (wants to put things in order). It helps give order and structure to our lives.

- The right side is basically non-verbal. It's relational (helping us connect to others), and experiential (meaning it focuses on how an event personally felt not necessarily on the facts).

- Left side is all about the letter of the law: "We need to play by all the rules in our backyard football game"

- Right side is all about the spirit of the law: "We need to have fun playing the game and not worry about every rule"

- Remember too that very young children are right-brain dominant so they tend to be very emotional and reactive. In other words, it's normal for kids to overreact, flip out or go ballistic.

- One of our key jobs as parents is to help our kids learn how to quiet their strong emotions, and make good choices by getting their left and right brain to work together. Yes, you have emotions, but we also need you to think and make good choices.

- In order to do this, we have to start with CONNECTION. This means coming to a place where we understand what our child is feeling and being able to showing them that we

understand what's going on inside them. When they feel like we "get them", their brains can calm, allowing them to access their upstairs brain.

### WHY CONNECT?

I want to pause here for a bit and just say this way of responding to our kids by connecting first actually works. I'll tell you how to do this in a second...BUT...it takes time and effort to retrain ourselves and it takes lots of energy to meet them in their emotions rather than just lay down the law using your stern voice.

You might also feel like this is permissive parenting when you let them express their emotions and empathize with them rather than quickly dealing with the behaviour and getting them to obey. I know...I quoted to my kids "you obey without challenge, excuse, delay". And lots of what we are learning about the brain feels like I'm excusing my kid or just delaying their obedience.

### If it's so hard, why bother doing it?

1. Science shows that kids are programmed to need their primary attachments to come from us their parents. If they don't feel connected to us in their pain, they will look for other ways to soothe their hurt, which will only cause them more pain because those things won't satisfy them. It's super important that we learn to connect with them now when they are little – even though their issues and struggles seem so petty and frustrating – so that we build their trust and feelings of security with us. God's given us this time now to practice and learn how to reach their hearts before their problems get big and real and they've stopped trusting us.

2. Science also shows, over decades of research, that when kids feel understood by their parents (or primary care givers) their brains can then develop skills that help them regulate their emotions, have empathy, learn self-control, greater success in school and have better relationships. This should be huge incentive for us to want to parent this way!

3. And we should also be motivated to train our children in this way because it's how God father's us! He is gentle, understanding and always ready to listen even though we know He also expects obedience. Psalm 103..."The Lord is compassionate and merciful, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. He will not constantly accuse us, nor remain angry forever...for he knows how weak we are, he remembers we are only dust" This brain stuff we are learning has helped me to have realistic expectations for my kids and to be compassionate when they are overwhelmed. A lot of their behaviour comes from them just not knowing how to handle things like disappointment, frustration, embarrassment, fear and so on.

### HOW DO YOU CONNECT?

-First, don't expect to be able to help a child if you don't love and know them.  
Get to know the kids in your Selah group.

-learn their names

-find out their interests

-be fun! Join in with them at the activities.

-Now when they are struggling with an emotion or behaviour problem we can't go to the logic until we have responded to the right-brain emotion. We do this by **acknowledging their emotions and making sure they feel understood**. So our words and a kind tone, a caring facial expression, using physical touch like a hug or rubbing their back can all help these kids feel we understand them.

-get down to their level, make eye contact

"Oh peanut, you seem sad about losing that toy", (not sarcastically, or with an eye roll...)

-the younger the child and the more in overwhelm they are, the shorter the sentences. Dr. Harvey Karp does this amazingly in *The Happiest Toddler On the Block*". Mad, mad, mad you are so mad! Wanted that cookie, you wanted that cookie...

Once the right brain has settled down you can redirect to the left and begin using logic and taking choices and solutions and boundaries.

### HOW DO YOU REDIRECT?

-Come in at the level they are at. **Start with playful interaction**.

-If they are just excited and hyper and throwing markers then playfully say with a smile, "Wow you have a good throwing arm!" Always try to redirect playfully first. 80% of behaviour stops there.

-If that doesn't work or **when their emotions are too high then: connect by getting down to their level and empathizing with them** and then... use authority in your voice, speak slower

**-Give them a chance to re-do:** Yes you can have some more water with your snack, but we ask with respect. Can you try that again but say please this time?

**-Give them choices:** You seem to be having trouble sitting on your bum like I asked. If you want you could sit on your knees or you could come sit in the back of the group beside me. You chose.

One last thought...**when was the last time you checked your no to yes ratio?** Think about how kids feel hearing no all the time! (no and yes experiment if time) Can you find a way to say yes? Yes you can have a drink a water but can you wait until after we are done our craft? Yes you can have that toy, but we need to wait our turn.

### Discussion:

Think of a scenario in your group where a child has gotten upset. What might your typical response be? What would connect and redirect look like?

What is one thing you could do to better connect with your group of kids at Selah?

## Connect and Redirect

Why Connect?

If they don't feel connected to us in their \_\_\_\_\_ they will look for other ways to soothe their hurt.

When kids feel \_\_\_\_\_ by their parents and leaders their brains can then develop skills that help them regulate their emotions, have empathy, learn self-control, have greater success in school and better relationships.

This is how God fathers us! (read or memorize Psalm 103: 8-14)

How Do You Connect?

Get to know the kids in your Selah group.

Acknowledge their big \_\_\_\_\_ and make sure they feel understood.

How Do You Redirect?

Start with \_\_\_\_\_ interaction!

Give them a chance to \_\_\_\_\_.

Give them \_\_\_\_\_.

When was the last time you checked your \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ ratio?

Discussion:

Think of a scenario that's happened in your group of Selah kids where a child has gotten upset. What might your typical response be? What would connect and redirect look like?

What is one thing you could do to better connect with your group of kids at Selah?