

Recap

Edina Parent Communication Network 2009 National Speaker:

Diane Gossen “Rethinking Discipline: Fostering Your Child’s Inner Motivation”

Uppbygging: Bring up the strength from inside. PCN National Speaker Diane Gossen explained that this Icelandic word says it better than English, where the closest word is restitution. Her teaching on discipline centers on the child bringing up the strength from inside to become a person in control, thinking about “who are you going to be?”

Ms. Gossen compared cultural approaches to discipline from around the world. In native cultures and in Asian cultures, the emphasis is to look within. By contrast, she explained, most of us were raised with external discipline: “You’re gonna get it!” Whether that means reward or punishment, the child is looking outside him or herself for how to behave. Restitution changes that focus.

She told the story of how she learned about restitution. Staying with a native Inuit family in northern Canada, she noticed how dignified and patient even very small children were. One day, while visiting with a grandmother, she saw a little boy spill his milk across the table. Without comment, the grandmother tossed the child a rag to clean it up. Ms. Gossen later asked the grandmother how the child was supposed to learn the right way to fix something if she said nothing. “Oh,” said the grandmother, “We say, ‘the right way: you’re not doing it.’ Or, ‘The way of our people: you’re not doing it.’ Then the child has to figure out for him or herself the right way.”

While it may appear then that restitution does not have bottom lines, the values of the group become the bottom line. The goal of discipline is to bring the person back into the circle made by those values, not to send them out or away.

Diane then explained the five basic needs of people: survival, power/mastery, belonging/connectedness, freedom/independence, and fun/generosity. Each person has these basic needs, but the intensity of the need varies from person to person:

- A power person learns by hanging back and listening until they can master the subject.
- A belonging person learns with sensitivity to the impact on other kids.
- A freedom person is very active, and not afraid to take risks or make mistakes.
- A fun person is trying to find the light side of a subject.

In misbehavior, Ms. Gossen explained, you start with the idea that the child could always have done worse. So long as they are misbehaving, they still want to belong and have not withdrawn. So, tell the child: “Give yourself credit—you could have done worse. Do you want to do better? Can you do better? Do you want our help?” These things help the child come back into belonging to the family or school.

She summarized this technique as “NBA: the Need expressed in the misbehavior, the Belief to return to and becoming A human being.” Then, it’s okay to make a mistake. If you make a mistake, figure out what you don’t like and next time what to do better.

At the parents’ forum, Ms. Gossen explained that restitution is designed to move the child’s thinking from the brain stem where they are acting out of fear and feelings to the front of the brain where action is intentional.

She said the main job in discipline is to create a space for the child to develop reflexiveness—that is, space for the child to develop meaning. Her definition of restitution is: creating the conditions to fix their mistakes and return to the group strengthened.

Keep asking, why do we have these rules? What belief is it based on? Our children will live in a world that we will never see, so they must learn how to learn to survive. Think about another way to think, and about the type of person you want to be.

There are six levels of restitution: the first three are less valuable than the second three.

1. Say “I’m sorry.”
2. Fix the mistake.
3. Self consequence, e.g. “I’ll go without dessert for a week.”
4. Collapse the conflict with win/win.
5. Find the gift in the misbehavior—what did you do to express your need?
6. Find the humor in the situation to realign perspective.

Ms. Gossen gave us a list of 10 things a parent can do to practice restitution:

1. Develop my picture of the ideal (not perfect) parent I want to be.
2. Tell my kids what I’m striving to do, so they’ll see my journey.
3. Be generous with myself—it’s okay to make a mistake.
4. Practice self restitution in front of my kids out loud.
5. Try to find the need behind behaviors I don’t like in myself and others.
6. Ask myself, “Could I be doing worse?” and give myself the answers.
7. Tell my family I love them especially when we have differences.
8. Ask questions instead of lecturing. Wait for the response when tempers aren’t flaring.
9. Laugh often and use humor to heal.
10. Remember daily that a family is where people get emotional learning. When in doubt, act like a real person, not a parenting manual.