

Connection before Correction

ARE WE FORGING RELATIONSHIPS OR CUTTING OFF CONNECTIONS?

By K. Meagan Ledendecker



I recently watched a video parody* of three moms in conversation, periodically talking to each other as if to their children. The effect, although humorous, was also disturbing.

After watching the video, I began to pay closer attention to what we sound like when we communicate with children. Are we issuing directives or asking for cooperation? Are we forging relationships or cutting off connections? Are we belittling or kindly reminding?

One way to become more aware of talking *with* our children, rather than *to* our children, is to practice the Positive Discipline principle, Connection before Correction. Connection before Correction means that we create closeness and trust instead of distance and hostility. If I notice my child has left his coat on the floor, it's most effective to connect with him first in a loving way before reminding him to clean up after himself.

Basic brain science explains why this is the case. Scolding, nagging, lecturing, blaming, shaming, yelling – all cause the recipient's brain to shift into “flight, fright, or freeze” mode. Children (and adults, too) function best when they feel safe, trusted, and accepted.

Connection before Correction can be as simple as first getting to a child's eye level and smiling before addressing the need at hand. Or perhaps it's saying, “I love you, and the answer is no.”

Other ways of making a connection include really listening, spending special time together, validating feelings, asking questions, and giving hugs. Effective connections are made when everyone involved feels significance and belonging.

I recently had a chance to practice Connection before Correction with some older students who hadn't been the best role models during a class meeting. Although I was upset about their choices, I took time to reflect upon how I would want to be treated if I hadn't been my best self. In the process, I sheepishly realized that I had, in fact, been snippy during a recent administrative meeting. If a colleague were going to talk to me about my behavior, how would I like the conversation to begin?

With a humble heart, I took each student aside and privately checked in about what was going on. I acknowledged each student's kindness and sense of responsibility, and wondered aloud how their choices had affected others. Rather than lecturing, accusing, or punishing, I came to the conversations with compassion and concern. As a result, the students didn't shut down, offer excuses, or point fingers. Their hearts were open and we could problem-solve together.

When children feel a connection, their sense of belonging and significance increases. Often this connection is enough to stop misbehavior and facilitate cooperation. The real bonus is that when we take the time first to connect rather than correct, we actually end up feeling better ourselves. Everyone benefits.

*Video from The BreakWomb: “If Moms Talked to Each Other the Way They Talk to Their Kids”

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December at Hawthorne Valley

**Hawthorne Valley Waldorf School
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10 am to 5 pm

**The Magical Puppet Tree Presents
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Saturday, December 5

Performances at 11 am, 12 pm, 1 pm, & 2 pm

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featuring selections from Handel's Messiah

Thursday, December 10 at 6 pm

Friday, December 11 at 7 pm

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