

no perfect parents

How To Discipline Without Getting Angry

By Rick Malm

Recently I was enjoying a cup of coffee in a public shopping area when I found myself in the middle of a standoff. A little boy of about five years old wanted to stay longer but Mom was anxious to leave.

Mom coaxed and pleaded but the little Rock of Gibraltar was not going to be moved. Finally she played her trump card, "I am going to count to three 1, 2 ..."

As a kid I always knew when Mom started counted I had better start obeying or I would face certain death.

Some parents count. Some bark the child's first and middle name in staccato cadence. Whatever method your parents used you knew it was time to pay attention and obey or else.

However, this little guy was not impressed. Mom slowly counted, "1 2" and then came the dreaded, "3".

Oh no! I have a squeamish stomach. I wanted to look away but I couldn't take my eyes off the scene. I suppose what happened next shouldn't have surprised me but it did. Mom angrily walked up, grabbed her son's little hand and started dragging his flailing body to the car.

She could have done that without counting. Why go through the math exercise if you are only going to overwhelm Junior with irresistible force? Perhaps there were other consequences when they got to the car but I am willing to bet nothing more happened.

Junior had learned that when his mom counted – at least out in public - her counting didn't mean any more than any of her other threats.

Like the mom in this scene some parents nag and threaten their kids but don't actually do anything. Others needle and threaten until they reach a point of anger. Then they do the counting or middle name calling or whatever and – voila - Junior obeys.

It looks like if you count or use a child's middle name they magically obey. But does counting really produce obedience? Does barking their first and middle name really mysteriously motivate kids to obey?



From personal experience I know I obeyed because the next step after the counting was ACTION.

Here is the key.

Action produces obedience.

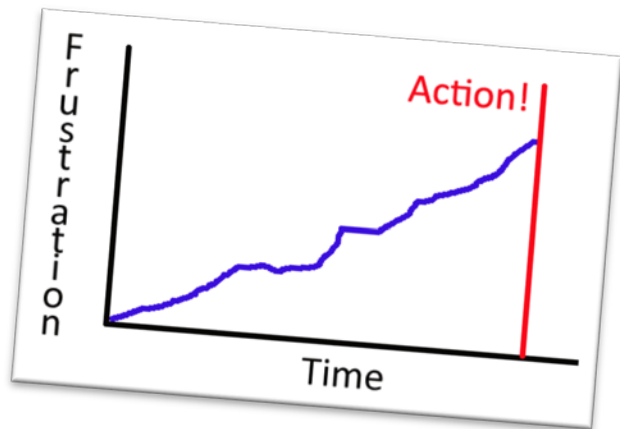
Threats don't do it. Warnings don't impress. It is when the child knows that the next step is action that they choose to obey.

When we don't take action unless we first count to three or bark their middle name we actually train our children to routinely ignore us when we aren't counting or yelling.

As a young parent someone explained this to me, showed me two charts and revolutionized my parenting.

THE CHARTS

Here is a time line of an average evening. Dad and Mom start the evening with zero frustration. As time moves along little things happen. Johnny disobeys. He refuses to do this. He balks at that.



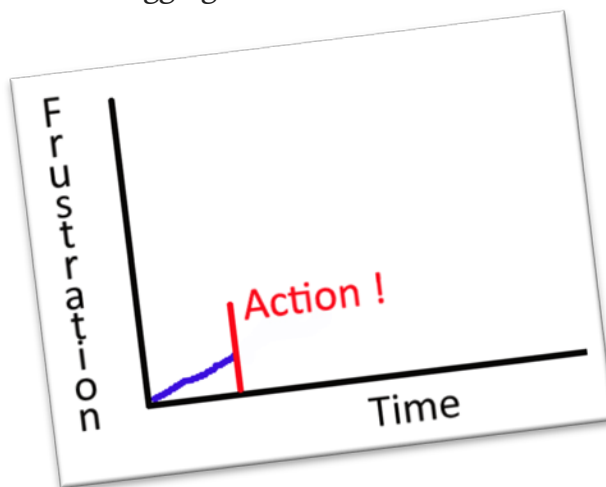
Dad and Mom's irritation is growing but they don't do anything. Their frustration level continues to rise until they've had all they can stand and they can't stand no more (to quote Popeye the Sailor).

Now they are angry and they launch into their counting routine. Johnny obeys because he knows what happens if he crosses the red line – ACTION.

But imagine with me what might happen if we simply moved the line for action to the left, back earlier in the night, before anyone is angry. What if we simply took action the first time there was disobedience and conflict.

Are you dreaming with me? Would it be possible to take action without all the frustration? Could it be done in a calm, loving and calculated way rather than as a reaction to our growing irritation? Is it possible we could even enjoy being with our children as they learn that immediate obedience is what keeps the unpleasant consequences from happening - no counting, no middle names, no growling, no threats, no nagging or badgering.

Are you dreaming with me? What if we would take action before we get frustrated? We could do what needs to be done in a calm, loving and calculated way rather than as a reaction to our growing anger? We could enjoy being with our children more as they learn that immediate obedience is what avoids unpleasant consequences - no counting, no middle names, no threats or nagging.



WHO REALLY NEEDS DISCIPLINE?

Notice, Junior doesn't change. He is still only motivated to obey when action is the next step. We do all the changing by taking action before we are driven to it by irritation and frustration.

It's easier said than done but it's possible to train our children to obey the first time. But when they disobey we must stop what we're doing, carry out appropriate consequences and do so without all the emotion that normally motivates us to action.

It takes discipline, but if we aren't willing to discipline ourselves how can we expect our children to be disciplined?

We must train ourselves to love our children enough to not ignore their bad behavior, not look away, not act as though we didn't see it. We must train ourselves to take whatever action is necessary to guide them in the right path even when it interrupts our schedule, impinges upon our comfort and is not driven by our own frustrations.

Discipline ourselves first so we can instruct our children in the way of discipline.