



WHY DO KIDS ACT THAT WAY?

HANDLING CONFLICT AT HOME

From birth to death, everything we do in life is an attempt to meet our need for safety, love, power, fun and freedom. The essence of parent/child conflict is that the child wants freedom while parents want the safety of holding them in. Success lies in teaching children how to go out safely and then letting them go.

Kids are Hard-wired from Birth

PIN's March presentation featured developmental psychologist Nancy Buck, who taught about Choice Theory, which explains human behavior. "We're all born with genetic instructions, and we experience these instructions as urges to behave in certain ways," Buck explained. Each urge is a response to a need for safety, love, power, fun or freedom. For example, no one has to instruct a baby to stand and then walk; in an urge for freedom and fun, the baby tries and tries again until he or she finally succeeds.



Rather than denying that these urges exist, parents should teach their children how to handle them responsibly and safely. "Parents should give their children only as much freedom as they have responsible behaviors to handle. Any more than that, and children will get frightened," Buck said. "Our job is to slowly increase our children's freedom as we teach—and they follow— responsible behaviors." It's more art than science. Striking the right balance of freedom and boundaries depends on the maturity and temperament of each child.

Getting Through Conflict

"By responding with 'No' to a child's request, parents set themselves up for a fight," Buck explained. Rather than stonewalling your child, she advises putting off your answer for a later time. "Then ask yourself, do I understand the request? Does the child have the responsible behaviors to handle the freedom of the situation?" Parents should also consider what they're afraid of, and whether there's another way to handle their concerns apart from saying No.

Buck stressed the need to create an environment of learning. "As human beings, we exist in two states: We're either closed for protection or open for learning." For example, a child being scolded for bad behavior will be closed for protection. Rather than seeing the wisdom of the better choice they missed, they're more apt to see a parent who has lost control.

"Learning takes place in a calm moment, after both parent and child have calmed down," Buck said. When the calm moment arrives, ask your child what it is they're trying to get through the bad behavior. Buck describes this as a "magical question" because children will almost always answer it. "Then add, 'If we can figure out a way to help you get what you want that's respectful and responsible, would you be interested in learning?'" Think through ideas with them, brainstorming to find solutions and possible compromises.

"Parenting is the most important job we'll do," said Buck. "The best instructions we've got are from our own parents, but just repeating what they did doesn't always make sense. You need to ask yourself *why* you're doing things." Get more help for parent/child conflict at www.peacefulparenting.com.

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