

Understanding Montessori

The Kids Talk Way



Be Proactive and Choose How You'll Parent

March 7, 2010

"If I have to go to another staff meeting and hear about being proactive, I might react negatively," Ann said as she took off her coat at the coffee shop. "Enough about me. Tell me what you've been writing."

I laughed. Ann probably didn't want to hear about this column, but her comments strengthened my desire to write about the importance of being proactive, the first habit of Stephen Covey's *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*.

A fundamental principle of being human, Covey tells us, is this: Between stimulus and response, we have the freedom to choose. How we choose is a combination of our levels of self-awareness, imagination, conscience and independent will.

When we have the habit of being proactive, we become responsible for our lives and our situation, along with making decisions based on principles and reflection. To be highly effective in our parenting roles, we need to be in the habit of acting proactively, even, if like my friend Ann, we are weary of hearing about it.

The idea of having the freedom to choose our response, no matter the circumstance, is fundamental to being proactive. Becoming self-aware of our language can help us develop a habit of being in control and not reacting to our problems. Becoming aware of

reactive language, then using our imagination, independent will and conscience to view problems differently will create new habits. If we find ourselves saying, "There's nothing I can do", we need to stop and change it to "Let's look at different alternatives." We can turn, "He makes me so mad" into "I can choose how I respond."

Josie, stepmother to four-year old Pete, told me, "Pete drives me crazy. He's loud. He's rude. He's messy. He's destructive. He destroyed the upholstery on our new couch."

"Why," I asked, "do you choose to let Pete drive you crazy?"

"What do you mean, I choose to let him drive me crazy?" Josie shot me an angry look.

"Just that. I think you can change this situation, by choosing to think differently about Pete and stepping back and using your imagination."

"What we feeds grows," I continued. "If you are concentrating on the behaviors that drive you crazy, then Pete's misbehavior becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy as you look for more behavior to 'drive you crazy'."

"I should look for behavior that doesn't drive me crazy and not react to the stuff that bothers me?" Josie said, eyebrows arching.

"Think of it as backwards thinking or trying to look at a situation with imagination and humor. I think as soon as you realize you are the adult-in-charge, and you choose to let a four-year-old boy and his behavior 'drive you sane', you'll be a more effective parent. And a lot happier."

Josie left with my copy of *Seven Habits* and a request to look for behaviors that 'drove her sane'. As long as safety and property damage were not issues with Pete's actions, Josie decided to ignore them.

A few weeks later, Josie told me that our conversation had helped her realize that she had let her thinking make her into a victim. "I wanted to blame Pete's biological mother, my husband, television, video games and Pete's friends for upsetting me. It bothered me when you suggested that I chose to be upset by Pete's behavior. As I read and thought about it, I realized I do have control over my feelings and attitude. When I get a little harried, I picture myself in the car driving to "Sanity", population 1."

Josie's eyes crinkled with a smile. "Every day you have to choose to act instead of react. Being proactive is a habit. A habit I'm glad to work on."

Next Week: Remember Happy Times with Family Pictures