

Help Parents Successfully Raise Responsible Children

A new book published in January, 2015, by the National Center of Biblical Parenting shows parents how to shape their children's values, habits, and attitudes. In *Motivate Your Child: A Christian Parent's Guide to Raising Kids Who Do What They Need to Do Without Being Told*, Dr. Scott Turansky and Joanne Miller R.N. weave together sound wisdom, Biblical stories and teachings, and parenting anecdotes to teach how to help children develop a good conscience and a strong faith. By parenting with intentionality instead of reactivity, parents can give their children the tools to navigate life successfully.

The authors point out that children usually engage in "Level One Thinking," focusing mainly on themselves and what they are doing. Parents can help children advance into "Level Two Thinking," becoming mindful of others and of the impact of their behaviors. As children mature, parents can guide them into "Level Three Thinking," considering how God is moving in their lives and in the world. Involving children in making plans for showing honor to others, for managing their own anger and other feelings, and for completing tasks in a timely manner transfers the responsibility to them and helps them develop an inner compass that will guide them for the rest of their lives.

Behavior modification, as used by so many parents, appeals to the selfishness of children and depends upon the promise of a reward that is more appealing than what the child naturally wants to do. The authors show how to train children to look around and see for themselves what needs to be done and then do it, because it is the right thing to do. Such training requires teaching, modeling, firmness, consequences, and correction, and the tone of the training is critical. Encouraging and nurturing words open the heart and build trust. By offering correction kindly – instead of irritably, for example, parents encourage children to accept redirection graciously. Of course it also helps if parents model accepting correction as a tool for growth: "Oops, I was wrong. I can learn from that." And "Will you forgive me?" Consequences that require the child to practice doing the right thing are far more effective than punishment. For example, a child who has been mean to a sibling might be asked to plan and carry out acts of kindness toward the same sibling. "Time-outs" should not be for a set time, but until something specific is accomplished ("Come back when you are calm enough to talk about this.")

The authors show how to use Scripture to develop convictions about the right things to do and how to structure practical applications of those values as part of everyday life. I especially like their model for correction, asking the child three questions: What did you do wrong? Why was that wrong? What are you going to do next time? They provide checklists to help parents assess the individual training needs of each child and a wide variety of anecdotal illustrations dealing with common parenting challenges. Parent support groups could read this book together, share experiences and challenges with each other, and use role play to practice strategies for dealing with specific situations. I think such a group would not only help parents train "Disciples of Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World," but would also strengthen the discipleship of the parents themselves.

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