

Asking Questions vs. Giving Answers

by Leslie Finlay

Parents arrive at our groups asking, “What should I do when my daughter won’t brush her teeth?” “. . . my son refuses to get in his car seat?” “. . . my children demand a snack at bedtime?”

The temptation, as Parents Educators, is to jump in with all our great ideas, suggestions, and helpful tips. Our quick response, however, can actually result in creating more problems than positive outcomes by inadvertently sending messages such as:

- Parents need an “expert” to solve their parenting challenges.
- There are “one size fits all” solutions to challenging behaviors.
- The child is the problem that we need to “fix.”
- Reacting to children’s unwanted behavior is the best parents can hope to do.

Asking parents pertinent questions provides relevant information about a specific problem parents are experiencing with their child. And, often through their answers, parents begin to see their challenges differently and learn to identify solutions. Here are some of the questions Parent Educators at Birth To Three use in their parenting groups:

- What do you want to see happen?
- How did you respond?
- How do you feel about what happened?
- Can you tell us a little bit more?
- What do you think he/she doesn’t yet know and needs to learn?
- What have you already tried?
- What do you think might be going on for him/her?
- Can you walk us through the morning, day, situation?
- What bothers you most about what happened?
- What is your fear about this?

By taking time to ask questions, gather information, and listen before offering ideas, the group may offer parents a different set of messages indicating that there are many different ways to approach parenting challenges:

- I can rely on other parents and on myself to solve problems.
- Parents can be proactive in making a plan to handle challenges.
- My child’s behavior makes sense in this situation.
- There are things I can change to make this better.
- I handled the situation pretty well and can do even better next time.
- Implementing a routine may be the best approach.
- I am not alone.

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