

PARENTING TIPS

Help Children Change Their Hearts

Too often parents focus only on behavior, getting the right actions down, but they don't address the heart. Jesus criticized the Pharisees, saying that they looked good on the outside but their hearts were still not changed. He said, "First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean."

Focusing on behavior change is not enough. Many parents work hard to help their children look good on the outside. Inadvertently, these parents teach their children "image management" the ability to appear good, clean, and nice. A change of heart is what children really need though.

Unfortunately, you can't force children to change their hearts. But we can do a lot to motivate them to make the necessary changes. We've identified several tools that, when used properly, address the heart. First, use sorrow instead of anger in the discipline process. Parents who misuse this technique often lay a guilt trip on their children. The key is to be genuine. If you, as a parent, look past your anger for a moment you will see that you truly are sad about what your child has done because you know the long-term consequences of such behavior. Reflect it in a gentle way. It's amazing to see how children will respond.

Another way to influence a child's heart is to use the scriptures. The Bible has an amazing quality, the ability to pierce through to the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Don't use the Bible in a harsh way. Instead reveal what the Bible has to say about being kind or respectful or obedient. There's a lot of wisdom and conviction that comes through the scriptures.

Be sure to talk about the heart during times of correction. "I can see you're angry because I said no. I'd like you to take a break for a bit and settle your heart down and when you're ready, come back and we'll talk about it." It will take work and a child may need some long times to settle down at first, but a change of heart is worth it in the end. Resolve the tension by having a positive conclusion together. Talk about what went wrong and why it was wrong. Address heart issues, not just behavior and help children see things from a deeper perspective.

You may think of some other ideas but whatever you do, don't rely on simple behavior modification techniques. They don't go deep enough and often don't address the real issues.

This parenting tip comes from the book, *Home Improvement, The Parenting Book You Can Read to Your Kids* by Dr. Scott Turansky and Joanne Miller, RN, BSN