

SEWING SEEDS OF WISDOM

by Sally Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

Recently we ran some parenting workshops at LifeWay's, "Festivals of Marriage" in North Carolina. One of our subjects involved preparing kids for making wise choices in life. I told the participants to imagine their kids' brains were full of bunches of grapes. Every grape represented an aspect of life that required some decision to be made. They would visit their 'bunch of grapes' every day looking for the ones that would give them the information to help them make the right choices. For example, if Tommy broke his sister's doll, what should he do? He could hide the doll, deny having anything to do with it, or fess up.

In thinking about it, Tommy would figuratively check the grapes and see what his parents had told him to do in this particular situation. If the correct response had been deposited in the 'grape', then Tommy would confess, apologize and promise not to be rough with Samantha's dolls again. If Tommy had not been given clear instructions or expectations, he would likely have chosen the path of least pain to him.

We literally have to spell out to our kids what the best choices are and why. If we don't, kids will be influenced by whatever or whoever they are around. We know that peers, TV, movies, video games etc do not necessarily portray our values. We also know that other people like caregivers, teachers, bosses, and extended family members often have different standards than we do.

The most efficient way of getting the right responses into our kids' heads is to set clear values, and explain why we consider these values important for our families. We then discuss what these values will look like in action. For example, "Respect in our family means that we don't touch others' stuff without asking. If we break something that belongs to someone else, we tell that person immediately and apologize. The consequence for not following this process is that a named corrective action will take place."

You have heard of the term, "Too much information." We need only give our kids the decision-making tools they need for their current stage of development or experience, and for preparing them for the next stage. For example, parents need to talk to preteens about issues they may encounter in their teenage years. For example, "Shall I try smoking?" "Shall I skip school today?" "Shall I keep the change after doing Mom's shopping?" "Should I tell Mom I saw Tommy stealing?" "I really like Johnny but he touches me in places that makes me feel uncomfortable. What should I do?" "I am at my friend's house watching a movie I know my parents wouldn't approve of. What should I do?" "I get so angry sometimes I just want to hit someone. How should I control it?"

There will always be some situation we have not prepared our kids for so, for unforeseen circumstances, we need to include a 'grape' that states, "If I don't know what to do, I will ask my parent."

Kids will ask for and accept our guidance when they see us as effective role models, when they see us making wise decisions, and when we keep a positive communication line open with them. We need to sew seeds of wisdom before something or someone else does.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.