

Shame's Effects

Shame prevents children from internalizing values and lessons. When a child internalizes values, he doesn't just do something because you say. As you consistently live and speak good values, he will eventually choose the right thing to do.

Example: A toddler has no filter. If they see someone who is handicapped, they blurt out, "Mama, what is wrong with that girl", as she vigorously points in her direction. You take your child aside and explain that this is unkind and that saying this hurts the little girl's feelings. Your child will remember that the next time, because you said so. But as you share compassion for others with her, eventually she will not point and say something unkind because she has internalized your value of compassion.

When a child has shame, their desire is to simply stay out of trouble. Often times they are compliant children, not because it is the right thing to do, but to avoid future shaming. Shaming a child does nothing to build kids with strong minds who are guided by an internalized value that causes them to make right choices. When children are shamed, they will focus on who they are – bad, rotten, useless, troublemaker, a disappointment, rather than the action they have done. They live with the knowledge that mistakes and childish foolishness will result in harsh, shaming words.

When your child does something that you want to yell at him for, consider this:

Was it direct disobedience, childish foolishness, or an accident? Your answer will determine your response.

In your response, are you addressing the action, or are you tearing down his character?

Developing Empathy

If you want your child to have empathy, the most important thing is that you have empathy toward your child. When we are angry with our children, it is tempting to lash out at them regardless of who is around. Yet, when we remove them to the side and speak to them privately it shows empathy for them.

Modeling Healthy Behavior

We model acceptable behavior, problem solving, empathy much more than we talk about it. When a child watches us deal with conflict by pitching a tantrum, they are learning. The most important thing when we pitch a fit is to own our behavior. When we say, you made me act this way, or look at what you made me do, we are not owning our behavior. We are heaping all of the guilt for our inability to control ourselves on our child.

Owning Our Behavior

When we own our behavior and apologize, it models for them that parents make mistakes and it's ok. Only when we own our bad behavior or mistakes is there room to consider the effects it has on others and to explore ways to change it.