

## **Tips for Parents** by Susie Kohl

### *Discipline: Listening to Other Points of View*

**M**Y FRIEND'S HIGH-ACHIEVING 17-year-old son gave her some parenting advice. He suggested restricting his younger brother's cell phone use until after he finished his homework. "You tell him to do his homework first, but you don't follow through," he pointed out. Without this important feedback, my friend realizes she would have continued nagging her younger son about his phone use with no results. She knew his grades were slipping but didn't realize she was contributing to the problem. She immediately set a new policy—no phones until school work is complete—and her 14-year-old started doing better. As a result of hearing another point of view, she was able to stop nagging her son about his phone. Instead, she could shower him with attention for being so responsible.

Where can we turn for feedback about whether our discipline techniques are working?

The idea of asking for feedback on discipline techniques was popularized with the TV series *Supernanny*, which ran starting in 2004 for several years. This reality show featured British nanny Jo Frost making home visits to families who had come forward because of their children's challenging behavior, and were open to an objective observer analyzing what they could do better. Since the participants asked for help, they were ready to make changes, and their situations usually transformed.

Most of us don't have a "supernanny" in our lives who can give us the magic formula for getting children to behave. Yet feedback is important in the area of child discipline because it is often so difficult to have a sense, like my friend, if we are actually undermining our own goals.

The abilities to both offer feedback in positive ways and receive other people's observations thoughtfully seems even more important today than ever, when people so often collaborate in caring for children. Partners obviously need to be able to discuss how to discipline their children, parents need to communicate their expectations to caregivers, and teachers want to partner with parents about children's behavior. It's fine for people to have different ideas, but listening to one another is crucial.

Here are some ideas:

**Start with a question.** When offering feedback, you might begin by asking how the other person felt the situation went. "Did you get the response you wanted? Can I offer some feedback?"

**Set boundaries when necessary.** Sometimes, when in-laws or friends have very different expectations or methods, giving feedback may mean setting a boundary. "In our house, we don't climb on furniture." "We don't feel corporal punishment is ever appropriate."

**Listen to your child's teacher.** If you hear that your child is being aggressive or acting out inappropriately, it's time to ask for feedback so you can work together to help your child handle situations more successfully. If we look on feedback from others as a valuable tool to help us become more aware, we are more likely to reap the rewards of going beyond our own narrow perspectives.

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