

SKAGIT FAMILY STUDY CENTER

FOUR BASIC IDEAS

1. Mistakes are precious. Humans can learn the most difficult lessons from their mistakes. Guilt and Shame and Fear make learning from our mistakes less likely. Children are born with the equipment to learn from experience. The parent's job is to keep them (to the extent possible) from being hurt physically or emotionally and to provide structures so that they know they are making mistakes **without** keeping them from learning from their mistakes. If an adult in authority is acting out when a child has made a mistake, the child focuses on learning what the adult is up to **not** on learning from whatever mistake the child may have made. The adult will not get their needs met.

Acting out behavior is a natural process for children. Children are struggling to tell us about their feelings and needs without words. Acting out can be viewed as "Bad" but if we choose to do this, the consequence for us will be that our children will continue to act as if they are not being heard. The desired learning will not happen until the adult changes their approach.

If I allow my mood to change when a child is acting out (i.e. seeing the behavior as "Bad") I am drawing the attention of the child to myself; I am choosing to get between the child and their consequences. The child's natural process of development will be delayed.

2. It is generally thought that the only function of time-outs and privilege loss is to provide a consequence for poor choices. A less understood but more important function of time-outs is to: (1) Stop engaging with what is escalating me. (2) Quiet my voice and my body and Focus on my own feelings and needs. (3) Reflect on Identifying, Labeling and Processing my feelings and needs. (4) Make a new plan based on taking responsibility for taking care of my own feelings and needs. (5) Praise myself for taking good care of myself.

An argument can be made that these **FIVE STEPS**, repeated over and over again, provide the information and experiences that move development from one stage to another. As development becomes not just a biological process but more of a bio-social process, these **FIVE STEPS** give us what we need to continue moving through more and more socially complex stages of development.

Choosing to take **FIVE STEP** time-outs and dealing with privilege loss is how human beings learn to become more mature.

3. Don't be patient! Delay leads to escalation. Work on consequencing quickly and without escalation. Healthy children act out until their need is met. Delay escalates everyone involved. Don't miss opportunities to provide the learning structure the child is asking you to give them. When we give children repeated chances to make poor choices before we provide a consequence, we teach them to manipulate us. At the same time we risk escalating ourselves and getting into a power struggle with them.

4. All real change is voluntary. Real respect is voluntary. Every human has a right to say "no" even if it means they are choosing negative consequences. True choice exists when the parent demonstrates a willingness for the child to choose the negative consequence.

We want to teach kids how to make **safe decisions** in the world... not to be **obedient**. When we teach them to be obedient to authority we teach them to be victims to predators. (Children get angry when we do this. It doesn't make sense to them.) Real respect is voluntary.