



CHILDPROOFING –It’s not just for toddlers!

By Judy Arnall

Two-year-old Kelsey is reaching for the wine glass on the coffee table at a baby shower. Her mom is constantly on guard, trying to move the guests’ purses, glasses and food plates out of the way so Kelsey doesn’t grab them. Kelsey’s mom is using a discipline technique called childproofing.

Although childproofing is the number one recommended discipline tools for parents of children ages crawling to four, it is also a very handy tool for parenting older children that are school-aged or teenagers. It’s the same technique, but called “Change the Environment” rather than childproofing. In fact, many arguments have been avoided by using the “changing the environment” tool for partners too! Here are some ways to change the environment to gain more co-operative behaviour from school-aged and teen children.

Add to the Environment

Enrich – make things more stimulating. Add toys, games, movies, food, and activities to occupy bored children. Children who are engaged in a fun activity have their needs met and are less likely to fight or engage in risky behavior if they are busy. Examples of this are: having games available for a long car ride; having lots of physical recess breaks (five a day) for school children; and having movies for teens to watch while parents are visiting.

Enlarge – add space. Take the children out to the park, zoo, ball field, movie, or playground. Make an enclosed backyard. Add space to a teen’s bedroom by moving out furniture. Arrange a dedicated play space in the house or certain rooms.

Subtract from the Environment

Reduce – take away stimulation and enticing situations. Reduce light and turn off the stimulating TV, computer games or ipod if you want them to relax and sleep at bedtime. Put away art materials and markers if the child doesn’t clean up the mess. Only bring them out when you have time to supervise a cleanup. Have a video game shut down at least an hour away from bedtime to allow your child time to unwind from the action. Put away anything you don’t want to capture their attention if you want to get them out of the house. Don’t bring up tense topics or deliver your “No” verdict on a request as you and the child are running out the door. Avoid starting a long movie when there is only a half-hour until bedtime or the time to leave the house.

Restrict – put limits on activities or areas. Avoid ball throwing, and chase games in the house, but direct to the yard or basement. Allow eating only at the kitchen table to reduce food encrusted plates shoved under the family room sofa or piling up next to the computer. Have designated places for water gun fights, craft materials, drum and band practice etc. Also putting pets away in back rooms before playmates or younger guests come over prevents damage to pets from young children's rough handling. Avoid competitive games such as computer and board games that can cause fights. Pack them away for a few years until children can developmentally handle losing better. Avoid play places if they get frustrated and hit other children. Avoid shopping if you know your child can't understand why he can't have treats from the checkout. Avoid busy places, amusement parks, and indoor arcade places if your child can't handle the restrictions and your limits on money, tokens etc. Keep in mind that you are not avoiding these places and activities forever. Your child's development changes monthly and their ability to handle limits and frustration will improve.

Change things around

Simplify – make it easier for the child to do things himself. Put buckets and totes at easy access for storage of toys. Hang coat hooks at child level. Have designated places for backpacks and charging ipods and cellphones, preferably by the door so that it's easier for the child to remember them the next day. Put dishes and lunch fixings in easy to reach and access places. Remove most toys and pack away in buckets that you can pull out and rotate for renewed interest. Have step stools in the kitchen and bathroom handy for young school-aged children. Have a basket for mitts, hats, and socks for each child, again, preferably by the door to catch those pesky socks that children remove as soon as they come in the house. Clip hair or nails while they are playing in the bath or sleeping. Buy socks all one color. Color-code the children's belongings. Have a central basket for only library books and insist that library books never get shelved or they get lost in the house books.

Rearrange – arrange things to encourage or discourage behavior. Have a system for daily tasks such as feeding pets, taking phone messages, emptying the dishwasher. Have a system for handling school paperwork and information flow such as school notices, and letters that go back and forth from school to home. Set out designated water glasses for each child. Put door guards on doors to prevent slamming door gouges in the walls. Move gaming consoles or drum sets to the garage or far away rooms to cut down on noise. Provide head phones for blocking offensive computer game language that younger children may hear.

Other common problem areas that can be addressed this way are:

Pet care, household chores, noise, toys/play areas, kitchen/food/playtimes, T.V./computer/video use, dirty clothes/laundry, homework, bathroom use, telephone, breaking/damaging, weekends, bedtime/getting up, privacy/property, sharing tools /equipment and many more areas of conflict.

A common question posed in classes is, "Why do I have to try so hard to change the environment when sometimes kids just have to listen to my authority?" Of course there

are times that kids just have to do as you tell them. But it's more likely to get a good cooperative response when parents are not constantly nagging about daily situations. Anticipating problems and planning ahead to avoid them just makes good relationship sense. Try and ponder how changing the environment could solve a behavior problem. Remember that changing the environment is always easier than trying to change another person.

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