

## Is Your Child Successful?

Children *want* to be successful. No child is happy being manipulative or out of control. In this context, I define success as feeling in balance with oneself and with one's world. I am not defining it in terms of accomplishments and external rewards like grades, money, winning a prize or getting the desired toy or sought-after job. Success here is a sense of personal "rightness," a belief that I am capable and acceptable and those in my world understand me. For many outwardly successful people these feelings still elude them. The goal of being successful is achieving a sense of inner peace. If we can parent our children with this perception of success perhaps we can gain a more peaceful world.

I believe that children truly want to be successful and when they are not—when they are behaving inappropriately—it is because there is a problem, an obstacle, in their way of success. (Unless the behavior is appropriate to the child's temperament and stage of development and it is only we who see it as a problem) Our job then is to see the misbehavior resulting from a problem in the child's way and to ask ourselves how we can help so her behavior will get back on track.

For generations, our parenting culture has taught us that inappropriate behavior is wrong and the child is bad for behaving this way and must be punished. Whether or not we follow through with that, that is indeed the framework within which we have made our parenting choices. The new perception views the misbehavior as a signal to a problem the child is having. The perception of the child is never "bad" but off-track, out of balance. Instead of punishing, yelling, or threatening, the goal is to understand the problem and help the child get back on track. If not addressed, the problem becomes greater until it becomes harder and harder for the child to be successful. If misbehavior is a signal to a need that

continues to be unmet or unheard, the child will likely get louder or more dramatic with her behavior in an attempt to finally be heard.

Three-and-a-half-year-old Michael has a very aggressive and strong-willed temperament and developmentally is just beginning to get a handle on impulse control. He has been told many times over the past two years not to hit. He is playing with his friend Adam who has been riding on the truck that Michael wants to ride on. Michael tells Adam three times to get off the truck. Adam ignores Michael and keeps riding. Michael hits Adam.

The old framework tells Michael's Mom that he has done a bad thing and must be reprimanded or punished so he will learn not to hit again. She has put him in time out, taken away TV privileges, and yelled until she is exhausted. Because of Michael's temperament, learning to control his aggressive impulses has been a struggle for him. Already he has learned over and over that he is bad and can't even do anything right. When his impulses get the better of him, his whole body goes into fight mode.

With the new approach, Michael's mother understands that Michael would be much happier being successful and that when he gets to the point of hitting, his energy level has overwhelmed him. He is out of balance with himself. His impulses have gained control. She sees that his three attempts at getting Adam off the truck even though said with anger and a growl, show that Michael is working at controlling himself. Just a short time ago, he would have hit right away. Adam's resistance to letting Michael have what he wants becomes the obstacle in Michael's way of being successful (not successful at getting the truck but successful at feeling in balance with himself). With this perception, his mother can take Michael aside (attend to Adam first if he is hurt) and let him know that she sees him working at not hitting, acknowledges the frustration she knows he must feel, and works with him again on what he could do in that moment of anger instead of hitting. Michael can hear her when he knows she understands how he feels and can get back on

track. Although she may be annoyed and frustrated, Michael's mother knows that continual reinforcement and reminding will help Michael to achieve impulse control much faster than punishment.

Gaining a new perspective of your child's behavior, whether a toddler or a teen, is hard work because we are going against the flow that has been carrying us along for generations. But when you can trust your child's natural desire to be successful, rather than seeing her as out to get you, manipulative, just doing that for a purpose, or trying to get control of the family, you will be able to see her behavior in a new light. Impulses, desires, resistance to feeling wrong, bad, and misunderstood are all obstacles that your child must deal with before she can get back in balance.