Changing Our Beliefs: A Parenting Paradigm Shift

Misbehavior = Communication

When your child is misbehaving, part of effective parenting is learning that misbehavior is a form of communication. Many beliefs about parenting get in the way of seeing misbehavior in this new way. A few automatic beliefs that may come up when our children misbehave are:

- They are spoiled.
- They are self-centered.
- They are just like me or they are just like my spouse.
- They can’t help it.
- They have bad genes.

All of these beliefs have you come to one conclusion: You are a “bad parent” when your child misbehaves. If this is your belief system, even if it is subconscious, you'll have to control your child’s behavior to prove that you are a good parent. Not only is this unrealistic, but it puts pressure on you and your children, makes it uncomfortable for friends and family, and is no fun. You would never think a crying baby is “a bad egg.” Instead, you would check if he is hungry, tired, too hot, too cold, or needs attention to feel safe. Why would it be any different for your toddler or even your teenager?

First Paradigm Shift: Misbehavior is a Form of Communication

It is much more practical to look at misbehavior as a form of communicating that something is wrong. Now you can focus on taking action that works. Instead of controlling your child, you work on figuring out what is wrong or missing and helping your child take care of himself with your help.

Children want to feel valuable, loved, and that they belong. If they don’t get that loving connection and feeling of belonging at home, they will find it somewhere else. Parents that complain that their children are more strongly influenced by friends may want to consider how well they are including their children in the family. All of the tools that you will learn in this course will help you deal with misbehavior by learning what your kids are communicating and working with them to take care of themselves with your help.

Second Paradigm Shift: Staying in the Present Moment
Another parenting paradigm shift is to move from anchoring to the past to being thoughtfully in the present. This is easier than it may sound. Some places where you may be anchoring your parenting to the past are when you have these types of thoughts:

- I must parent just like I was parented.
- I must do things differently than my parents.
- We never do (fill in the blank) in this family! (The permissive mom’s anthem is, “I never say no to a child!”)
- My children must always act (fill in the blank) when (fill in the blank). The autocratic dad’s common convection is “My children must never interrupt conversations when sitting at the dinner table.”

Examples of the Paradigm “I am thoughtfully in the present when I parent.”

- You get help and advice when you need it from trusted mentors.
- You use guidelines to parent and limit hard and fast rules to only certain, very specific situations.
- You reference your own childhood experiences thoughtfully, looking for how these experiences trigger you to automatic reactions without thinking, especially when those reactions are colored with anger or sadness.
- You pick parenting techniques from your past that work for you and discard the rest.
- You think about future outcomes before you act. You design thoughtful action to produce a close connected relationship and a responsible and respectful child. This helps you avoid knee jerk reactions.
- You look for indications that you are making a mistake and move to repair mistakes quickly and openly.

A big breakthrough in my parenting happened when I noticed how the paradigm that I got from watching my parents was strongly influencing the way I parented. The first emotional indicator that I noticed was that I was getting frustrated and angry with my children and/or spouse. Once I noticed those emotions, I was able to “hit the pause button” and think about why I was being triggered, which gave me time to design a new parenting technique or get some help on what to do. A great example of this is eating dinner at the table with my younger 4-year-old son. It would frustrate and drive me crazy when he made a big mess at the table. And I focused most of that frustration on my wife, who I subconsciously thought “should” be teaching them better manners. Sensing that trigger and knowing that it was coming from something in my past, I took some time to think about what I could do to change the situation without getting triggered. Now my son cleans up after himself, not as a punishment but as a helper, and I also actively model for him a neater way to eat, with smaller bites.

Another example of me shifting my mindset is when I’m teaching my older son about playing sports. He tells me that he wants to learn a sport like baseball and soccer, but when we go out to practice he gets pretty distracted and stops after about 10 minutes. Noticing
how this would impact my mood negatively gave me the opportunity to look at the situation differently and get help on what to do. This not only impacted how I coach my sons in sports, but how I approach playing with them and creating situations that are fun and promote the skills they need.

by Jeff Everage, RCB Instructor