



Kathryn Zentner, LCSW
8701 Shoal Creek Blvd. Ste 403
Austin, TX 78757

kathryn@bluestarcounseling.com
www.bluestarcounseling.com
(512) 497-2177

Two Heads are Better Than One

So much of our parenting revolves around us telling our kids what to do--because "we know best." I think much of this stems from our desire for our kids to have everything work out good for them. We share what we know because we don't want our kids to make mistakes and suffer the consequences!

Yet, we all know that making mistakes can actually be good for children (when the price is small). And, as parents we can help turn our children's mistakes into learning opportunities. But, it's still hard to figure out how to make that happen. What will help our children learn how to make good decisions for themselves?

Take, for example, school work. A parent told me recently that she was having trouble getting her 2nd grade son to read the required 20 minutes each night. She was constantly reminding him to read and was getting very little compliance: each night her son had some reason why there was no time to read. She tried all the positive motivation techniques (such as buying him interesting books to read) and negative motivation techniques (such as denying privileges until the reading was done) that she could think of, but nothing seemed to work.

As the problem persisted over the course of a several months the mom was becoming more and more anxious. She began to worry that if her son didn't do all the reading required it would reflect poorly on her as his parent. Plus, she was concerned that her son would not get the prizes the school was offering as incentives. Of course, the mom wanted her son to love reading, and she knew getting into power struggles would not help, but she did not know what could possibly motivate him to want to read.

But, this mom was determined to find a solution. She considered her options. One option was to back off and let her son "fail". He would not get the school's prizes for completing the required reading time. She could even call the teacher and explain all of her efforts to get her son to read and make sure that the teacher knew she was a parent who "tries" to get her son to do as expected. But, the stakes seemed higher than that. This mom really believed that her son should be reading more--and she didn't think losing the school's prize would really motivate her son. So, she considered another option: problem-solving. She decided she would try handing this problem back to her son. She wanted to see if "two heads together" could come up with a better solution.

First she asked her son if he felt good about how the reading was going.

He said, "No."

She asked him if he wanted to be able to read what was required.

He said, "Yes."

So she said, "You are supposed to read a total of at least 100 minutes per week, how do you think you can get that done?"

He said, "Well, I could read 50 minutes one day and 50 minutes another day."

She was floored! Her son, at age 7, had come up with a solution she had not thought of!

Still, she was not 100% optimistic--after all, she had a hard time getting her son to read for 20 minutes, so she thought it was highly unlikely he'd read for 50!

But, she said, "So, you think you can really do that twice a week?"

He said, "Yeah, sure."

So, she believed him.

She stopped nagging him about it.

Soon her son started coming to her and telling her when he had completed his reading. There were no more power struggles. He had come up with his own solution and was making it work!

Plus, there was one more benefit. Pretty soon the mom noticed that her son was reading even MORE often than twice a week, and reading for a total of MORE than 100 minutes. Her son was developing a love for reading, just like she wanted. But, it only worked when HE was included in the problem-solving process.

Happy parenting!