



Disengaging: Stopping the Cycle of “Stuff”

Learning to Disengage

As parents, we search for tools to end the power struggles with our children, and motivate them to conform to our often well-intentioned directions for them. We don't typically see ourselves as part of the problem other than not having been able to come up with THE PLAN that will skillfully outmaneuver our kids. We don't realize that we're often doing the very same kinds of things, perhaps packaged a little differently, that we have always done, and are, therefore, engaged in the cycle with them. We must learn new skills and develop new plans in which to exercise them if we want to achieve different results.

One of the first and most difficult steps a parent is encouraged to take is to disengage. While seemingly a simple task to accomplish, it requires enormous energy and should not be undertaken without knowledgeable support to develop a plan and carry it out.

DISENGAGING: Basic Steps to Include in the Plan

1. Determine the particular problem area needing to be focused upon, e.g. conflict over allowances, drug and alcohol abuse, homework or truancy.
2. Commit to doing nothing to change the behavior for a specified period of time, usually a week.
3. Become an observer – commit to journaling (just document what's happening).
4. Practice sincere one-liners, e.g. “You can choose to feel that way”, and “This doesn't work for me”.
5. Call for support from another group member whenever necessary.

6. Discuss results of observations the following week with group members.
7. Commit to withdrawing from blameful, argumentative, lecturing or explanation and anger-ridden confrontation in a specific area of conflict for a specific period of time with the help of one-liners and support.
8. Commit to waiting to impose consequences on the child for poor choices until an appropriate plan can be developed with input and support from others.
9. Continue journaling each occurrence of conflict.
10. Work in group to develop a new plan for interacting with the child. This should be implemented when feeling more confident of ability to disengage when the child presses toward more familiar interactions.
11. Repeat as necessary!

This method of learning new responses teaches us to become observers of ourselves as well as our children, and helps us to remain in charge of ourselves. We are thus able to maintain a sense of personal power. We become open to more appropriate and productive ways of interacting with our children, reducing anger and paving the way for better relationships built on respect. This work is also a prerequisite to being able to detach from our children.