5 WAYS TO HAVE YOUR CHILD KNOW WHO’S IN CHARGE

Author of *Discipline Without Damage: How To Get Your Kids To Behave Without Messing Them Up*
1. Give flowers before they ask for them.

Let’s pretend it is your birthday.

And you are really hoping that your spouse or friend or boss or whomever has not forgotten.

But…it is already 4:00 pm and still not a peep out of this person that would tell you your birthday has even been remembered! Finally you can’t stand it any longer so you start fishing: “Ummmmm, sooooo, kind of a special day today right?...”

The words are no sooner out of your mouth and you get that awful kind of blank stare that people give out when they realize they have really messed up.

So now this person runs about and throws something together – maybe they grab flowers from a nearby gas station or a cake from the closest grocery store – and rush back to you with said offerings in hand, hoping that you will accept them and this egregious wrong will be righted.

Now, how do you really feel about those flowers or that cake? Do you accept them and move on, knowing your spouse/friend/boss really is the best in the world? Or do you begrudgingly accept them and insist that everything is “fine” but deep down inside, know that you are no longer able to count on them to just get it.

Your children are the same way.

So surprise them with “I love you’s.”
Surprise them with favorite dinners.
Surprise them with knowing winks.
Surprise them with perfectly timed hair tousling.

Do whatever you can to be the one in charge of the love dynamic in your relationship with your child.
It truly does make their world go ‘round!
2. Get your swagger on!

What would happen if you went in to see a specialist doctor - maybe for an ongoing medical problem - and you had been waiting weeks, even months, to see this person. Then, finally there you are, in her office, and she meekly steps into the examining room, shoulders slumped, without making any eye contact.

She offers a tentative hand for shaking but forgets to actually introduce herself. She goes to speak and her voice is a bit squeaky, betraying an obvious lack of confidence.

How much trust are you going to have in her care of you? Probably zilch!

Why? She’s got no swagger. And if this is true of you in a medical exam room, it is true even more so of your children in their relationship with you.

So get your swagger on! Be all knowing. Be in charge. Act as though you have got this, even if you feel like you don’t.

Throw your shoulders back, march yourself confidently about, speak with conviction, and do it all with a giant dose of kindness. That, my friends, is swagger!
3. Never have them feel like they are too much to handle.

Never have your child feel like they are too much for you to handle.

Imagine: they come into this world, physically and emotionally dependent on you for their very survival. Evolution itself has set your children up to look to you, be guided by you, and take their cues from you.

And so, the damage done by exasperated expressions like “I don’t know what to do with you!” or “What is wrong with you?!” or “I don’t understand you!” is huge.

Avoid this at all costs.

Walk away for a moment and settle yourself if you must. An “Oops – sorry sweetie – just one second – I forgot I have to call grandma back quickly!” can buy you a minute or two to get your big-person hat back on. And then, walk back towards your child, swagger in full glory, and knowingly nod about whatever exasperating thing has gone down.

They need you. Full stop.

Don’t ever have them question your ability to understand them.
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4. Be omnipotent.

Often parents will come to me and ask about impossible situations and what they could have or should have done differently in that moment to MAKE IT STOP!!

Let’s say your child is having a full-on meltdown (MD!). When a child’s brain has advanced to this level of disregulation, the honest truth is that it is just going to be what it is going to be.

With some nurturing care and compassionate guidance, you will eventually be able to soften your child back to a place of calm. But in the interim, the mother of all meltdowns is just going to have to play out. Rather than trying to stop what is inevitable, get your swagger on and actually will it to happen.

Imagine how powerful and safe you feel to your child when you can be in charge of their lack of control?!! What if you were to say, “Oh sweetheart, sometimes all the yells and shouts just need to come out – you go ahead and let them out. That’s-a girl. It’s going to be ok. I am right here. We will get this sorted. I’ve got you.”

Suddenly, the whole tone of this “out-of-control” situation has been turned into something that you have got under control. By stepping in front of and in charge of the MD, you reinstated your child’s belief in your in-control position at a time when they most desperately needed it.
5. Be a "No Matter What" big person.

When my son was 3 years old, we were at a crazy outdoor amusement park where he was delightfully sliding down a giant inflatable slide. We had used up 3 valuable ride tickets to get on that slide for 5 minutes of fun.

As the time was about to end, I gave Maxwell a heads up that he had 3, then 2, then 1 slide left, knowing that it would be hard to walk away from that kind of a good time. And sure enough, as the games person flagged me to usher him out of the slide area, poor Maxwell near about lost his sweet little mind.

But there was no option. It was over and it was time to transition onto the next thing.

So I scooped him up with some reassuring words as he continued to holler and flail, and as I was walking off with him, he managed to connect his teeth with my forearm and bit down. Hard. Like visible-insertion-marks-from-all-of-his-teeth kind of hard.

I knew he was beyond himself at that point. I directed his mouth away from my arm and softly uttered calming, loving words. He eventually settled and all was well.

As for me, I had a fabulously nasty mark on my arm that lasted several days. It was about 3 days later as I was carrying him on my hip, chewed-on-arm wrapped around him, when he gingerly traced his dimpled finger over the bite mark.

He said, “Momma, I bit you and you loved me.”

Yup. That’s right. Somewhere in his attachment-focused brain, the moment of 3 days earlier had landed. And not with an indignant memory of having been robbed of some more sliding. But with the most important memory of all: that I love him no matter what.

No matter how difficult, how loud, how full of bites, how anything – I love him and endeavour to have that flow no matter what.

Be that for your child.

There is absolutely nothing in this world that puts you more in charge and has a child more willing to take your lead than when he or she has the sense that you are full of a never-ending kind of love and compassion for them.
Dr. Vanessa Lapointe is a registered psychologist who has been supporting families and children for over 15 years. She presently works in private practice in British Columbia and has previous experience in a variety of settings, including the British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development and the school system.

Dr. Lapointe’s passion is in walking alongside parents, teachers, care providers, and other big people to really see the world through the child’s eyes. She believes if we can do this, we are beautifully positioned to grow up our children in the best possible way. As a mother to two growing children, Dr. Lapointe strives not only professionally, but also personally, to view the world through the child’s eyes.

Read more about Dr. Lapointe and her positive parenting articles on her website: www.drvanessalapointe.com

Her book, Discipline Without Damage: How To Get Kids To Behave Without Messing Them Up will be in stores on January 15, 2016 and is available for preorder.