

Helping You Navigate Your Journey Through Parenting

The Importance of “And” in Kind and Firm Parenting



BY KIM DeMARCHI

Kindness and Firmness are two words that are rarely used at the same time, however they absolutely work best when used together! Some parents are kind, but not firm. Other parents are firm, but not kind. Many parents vacillate between the two - being too kind until they can't stand their kids, and then being too firm until they can't stand themselves. This is what I call, "Rollercoaster Parenting". The rollercoaster parent is very permissive until things spiral out of control, then they tighten up the reigns, then they feel guilty and become too kind again, then realize they need to have rules and enforce them no matter what. This constant up and down method of parenting can be confusing to the child and ineffective.

Kindness is important in order to show respect for the child. Being kind is treating both yourself and your children with respect. Parents who tend to be more permissive might think "Kind" doesn't always feel and sound as sweet as they want it too. Some of these parents are so fearful of being punitive, that in

the name of kindness, they may be doing the following:

- Pleasing
- Rescuing
- Over-protecting
- Pampering - providing all the "wants"
- Giving too many choices
- Making sure children never suffer and are always happy

Firmness is important in order to show respect for ourselves and for the needs of the situation. Being firm is simply knowing what your rules are and communicating your rules calmly, clearly and consistently. If you are only using authoritarian methods, without any kindness, it comes off as very dominating. Punishment is very disrespectful. Consequences, which will be covered in the future, are ideal.

What happens for most of us is that we oscillate between these two extremes trying to find that ever elusive balance. Stop looking for balance! The key to being effective is to have firmness and kindness at the same time. Easier said, than done, especially when opposites attract. Would you consider yourself kind and your partner firm or vice versa? It's interesting to note how often two people with opposing philosophies about kindness and firmness get married. One has the tendency to be just a little too lenient. The other has a tendency to be just a little too strict. Then the lenient parent thinks he or she needs to be more lenient to make up for the mean old strict parent. The strict parent thinks he or she needs to be more strict to make up for the wishy-washy lenient parent. The couple get further and further apart and fight about who is right and who is wrong. In truth, they are both wrong. Both parents need to come more toward the middle and work as a team.

So, what does kind and firm at the same time look and sound like?

One of my favorite examples is, "I love you, and the answer is no."

Others examples:

"I know you don't want to stop playing (validate their feelings), AND it is time for dinner."

"I know you would rather watch TV than do your homework (show understanding), AND homework needs to be done first."

"You don't want to brush your teeth, AND we'll do it together. Want to race?" (Redirection)

"I can tell you don't want to mow the lawn, AND what was our agreement?" (Kindly and quietly wait for the answer - assuming you decided together on an agreement in advance.)

"You don't want to go to bed, AND it is bedtime. Do you want one story or two stories as soon as your jammies are on?" (Provide a choice)

"I can see you want to keep playing video games, AND your time is up. You can turn it off by yourself, or I can do it for you." (A choice and then follow through if need to)

Kind-and-firm parenting at the same time can feel slippery and hard to put your finger on. Keep taking small steps in the direction you want to go and when you hit

that kind and firm zone, you'll know it. Take time to acknowledge yourself - remember how it felt for you and how your child responded. Relish it. When we linger on our successes, no matter how small they may seem to us, we change our brains and we increase the likelihood of repeating such successes!



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