

FOREWARNINGS

“Are we going yet?” Nicky pleaded. “In a little while more,” replied the father with a kind voice. John then turned to me and said, “Boys will be boys...”. I smiled and then for the fifth time quickly kept the conversation going because time was running out. The truth is, I felt guilty, since I quietly wished he had not brought the kids along. Then we can just take our time and chill out. After all it’s been years... Sigh.

On the seventh time of asking, I decided I need to be happy, so I said “boys, you guys have been wonderfully patient. Just give your dad and I ten more minutes and we will be done.” They went away quite happily and left us to wrap up. I thought the last ten minutes was the best because I did not feel guilty making the kids wait for the adult talk to finish an hour or so. The kids had left us in peace and I had stopped looking around the restaurant worried where they have run to if things were too quiet and feeling awkward when the noise was too loud. After all I knew that it was not fair to keep the kids waiting.

I had applied the principle of fore-warning. This is a great relational tool for a person in authority like a teacher or parent to help their charges to be emotionally prepared for a change of activity. An example is when an exam invigilator announces that you have 5 more minutes before time’s up and everyone has to put their pens down and stop writing. Another is to help kids to prepare themselves to stop whatever they are doing like a computer game and switch off the console for another activity.

Many parents had told me how difficult it was to stop their kids from say, watching TV. When I ask whether they had firstly set an agreed timing to switch the TV off, they would say “No”. Then asked whether they had forewarned them of the minutes before the switch off time, they again said “No”. As a result children feel parents are unfair, controlling, tyrannical, joy-robbers, etc.

To avoid such clashes, I have found that the key lies in forewarnings. First calmly agree on time for cessation of activity with your kid before the activity starts. Then enforcement is made easier if fifteen minutes before time, a first call is announced of the impending switch off time. Third, the last forewarning is made five minutes before and then the final call to shut down. Kids normally would not argue or resist you except maybe an under the breath grumble because you had given sufficient warnings. It is the abrupt disruptions, even if agreed on earlier, that makes children act up.

Forewarnings help children to build an inner discipline of keeping to time if you start them young. They know the rules and you then do not need to 'bark' out your enforcements. When children fail to keep their pledge, you can also teach them about promise-keeping and get them to see for themselves how they have to make amends. Normally, a penalty of deduction or equivalent penalty of time extended would underline the discipline of doing different things at different times.

I hope you will find this tool helpful. Let me also take this opportunity to wish you all a very blessed season's greetings in the school holidays. Have a great family time of connecting and strengthening your bonds.

Blessings to you and your family.

This article was taken from Centre for Fathering