

## How Giving A Simple Direction Can Create Clarity

by Joe Newman, Author of *Raising Lions*

Quite often with a 3-, 4- or 5-year-old, there's a lot of grey areas when they're testing boundaries and you're not sure a break is necessary—maybe he's touching the baby's face and he's looking at you and he's got this look in his eye like he's thinking, "Can I do this? How about this? Am I making you nervous? What can I do before you say something?"

Typically, parents give ambiguous information in these moments, like, "Be careful. Your baby brother is very delicate, so I need you to be gentle."

What is more effective in these moments is to give a clear action direction, "I need you to come and stand next to me for a moment." Then, if he's not moving to follow your direction, count: "5...4...3...2...1..." And if he hasn't come to you by the end of the count, give him a break. If he does come to you, have him stay there for a moment and then either let him return or give him a direction to play somewhere else. This inserts a very clear map for him (and you) to follow in that moment. You've asked him for something specific, and you've given him a clear timeline. He'll begin to take your direction in these moments, because he doesn't want a break.

It's important that the parents aren't threatening to do a break (so it's not—"I need you to come over to me, or I'm going to give you a break") because we want him to generate this thought and self-prompt in this moment.

You say, "I need you to come and sit on the couch to play." He ignores you and you say, "5...4...3...2...1..." Then if he's



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still not on the couch, and you say in a relaxed tone, "Oh, now I need you to take a break." Now he looks up and says, "No, no, no! I'll sit on the couch." And you respond, "It's no big deal. You take the break; then you can go to the couch. Right now, you have a short break."

You follow this pattern because your goal is to have your child follow your directions when you give them. Once you have a break process in place, you can give all kinds of other prompts, because now he takes your words seriously. As you move forward, you ask him to do what you need, and if he doesn't, you give him a break, or you count down and then give him a break. But you don't always have to count down.

You might simply ask your child to do something and then pause quietly for five seconds and then give the break. You don't have to do it the same way each time because you want to keep him on his toes, so he learns to hold an awareness of your needs. There's

no judgment in your tone with this; it's easy, it's fun, it's playful—like your child. This speaks directly to the difference between punishments and consequences.

You can begin by giving a clear direction and then counting. A few days later, you shift to pausing quietly for 5 seconds, then giving the break. Inevitably, your child will say, "Wait! You didn't count!" and you can tell him, "Well I'm not always going to count. I don't want to work so hard. You know what happens after I give you a direction. I wait a few moments, and then you get a break. It's no big deal; you take the break, and you come right back." The tone of voice you use and the lack of moralizing is the difference between punishment and consequence. You're shifting from judgment and anger, which implies his actions are either good or bad, to good-natured coaching with cause and effect.

There is often a misunderstanding that administering cause and effect without judgment is too

soft, but it's not; it's actually more effective. When your child is very defiant you can give consequence after consequence after consequence and frustrate the heck out of him. But the more you frustrate him, the more your tone should be sweet and empathetic so that your children focuses on the consequence of their choices rather than your judgment of them. ■



**Joe Newman** was born and adopted in 1963. In 1970 he was diagnosed ADHD and

medicated with Ritalin. Everywhere he went, the playground, the classroom, even at home, Joe heard one message loud and clear: you're broken; your brain doesn't work; you don't belong." No surprises when, at eighteen, he dropped out of college, shaved his hair into a mohawk and took off to surf the coastlines of the Caribbean and Central America. It was out in the world, working scores of jobs and starting his own businesses, where Joe realized he was not actually broken. Away from the tethers of school and home, Joe realized the same qualities called disorders were also qualities of positivity and value. Aggression became passion, distractibility became broad understanding, and stubbornness became tenacity. Realizing there must be millions of children out there, just like him, with ferocious spirits but misunderstood, he threw himself into finding and reaching these children.

His book, *Raising Lions*, has developed a growing following not simply because it helps parents understand why their children behave the way they do, but because the tools and solutions actually work.