

Parenting Process for Your Child's Success Podcast

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0:07 ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

Hello, I'm ANNMARIE MCMAHILL with the Center for Health and Safety Culture at Montana State University and this is the ParentingMontana.org podcast. In this ParentingMontana.org podcast, we'll be learning about a parenting process for your child's success.

BARBARA HOPKIN:

Having a process to follow, to build relationships and communication skills really sets kids up for positive things in their future.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

I'd like to introduce our guest today, BARBARA HOPKIN. Barbara earned her bachelor's degree in English Education from Florida State University. After teaching middle and high school students, she earned her master's degree in counseling from the University of Wyoming. Barbara's worked with children and families as a community, mental health counselor, and school counselor. More recently, she's been a parenting coach for ParentingMontana.org, where she's had the opportunity to work with multiple families across Montana. So welcome Barbara.

BARBARA HOPKIN:

Thank you.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

Thanks for being here. We are talking about a parenting process for a child success today. A step by step process parents or someone in a parenting role can follow. So let's start today by having you explain a little bit more about what this is.

BARBARA HOPKIN:

The parenting process is a way for parents to interact with their children. It can be used to address simple challenges or more complex challenges. But it's intentional and it can really build your child's skills. It can also really improve your relationship with your child, as well as your communication with your child as you use the process.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

So I'm pretty certain that when I was growing up, my parents didn't have a process they were following. And early on with my own kids, I know I read books and I soaked up theories on parenting, but once they arrived, a lot of what I learned, it just went out the window. So using a parenting process sounds a bit daunting. How do you even get started?

BARBARA HOPKIN:

So you begin slowly and you choose one issue or topic that you'd like to practice the process to address. Maybe you'd like to work on confidence with your child, or maybe you're hoping to grow, to grow their reading skills. Then once you decide where you'd like to start on the website, you pick a tool for your child's age and begin working through it as a guide, there's step by step ideas of how to get started and what to say. There are summaries to print out so that you have the ability to post the tool that you chose somewhere, and it's easy to access. And as you become more familiar with the process, you become more comfortable and you might even find yourself using it without a specific tool to address things that come up in daily life with your child.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

So I know that throughout the day, I have a lot of conversations with my kids. But I don't plan out each one like that. How, how would you even get started, doing something like the parenting process?

BARBARA HOPKIN:

So you think about areas that you'd like to see a change, maybe a behavior that isn't going well. And then by using the process, you really get to have an engaging conversation with your child about what's going on, how they're feeling about what's going on, and then you get to decide, you know, what skills you would like to teach them and be able to support them through using the process to grow new skills and change behaviors.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

So it's not, it's a process, it's not a script, right? It's just a way of interacting with your kid?

BARBARA HOPKIN:

Exactly. It's a way of interacting and it's some steps to follow, but you don't have to follow them in order every time either. So it's just a way of interacting in a process to communicate that really conveys respect and helps children gain confidence and make healthy choices.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

So I'm thinking that if I have a process for dealing with everyday issues like confidence or reading, I'd have a pretty good foundation for dealing with bigger issues down the road. Is that right?

BARBARA HOPKIN:

Yes, that's exactly right.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

We know that from Parenting Montana.org, that there are five steps to the parenting process. It starts with getting input, then teaching, practicing, supporting, and recognizing.

BARBARA HOPKIN:

Yes. And through those five steps in the process, you're engaging in a conversation with your child. You're teaching them skills, you're allowing them to practice, you're supporting their learning and you're recognizing their effort along the way as they try new skills. And most importantly, going through the process really helps to build a positive relationship with your child.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

Okay. So I wanna dig in with you on what each step is, why it's important and what it looks like with children at every age. So let's begin with step one, which is get input. So what is this?

BARBARA HOPKIN:

So getting input is about really purposely creating an opportunity to interact and engage with your child, to really hear them out and, and listen to understand their perspective and their feelings on something.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

Okay. So help me understand what that means for parents with infants. How would you do that?

BARBARA HOPKIN:

So for an infant it's really about getting to know their facial expressions, their movements, their sounds, and becoming familiar with the way that they can communicate at that age.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

Okay. So getting input is about getting to know and understand them, what they're feeling, what they need. I remember those early days, uh, and, and that learning curve that came with that. How about for parents with teens, you know, children and teens? What does input look like for them?

BARBARA HOPKIN:

So for them, input really looks like creating an opportunity to engage where you truly hear and value what they say. So you're really listening to understand and asking questions to help them dig a little deeper and engage with you about a topic.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

So I can hear people saying that it sounds like getting input would maybe undermine their authority as a parent. Can you just speak to that a little bit?

BARBARA HOPKIN:

Sure. So getting input doesn't undermine authority, it actually helps to teach respect and helps your child develop critical thinking skills and problem solving skills. While you listen to their concerns and allow them to share their ideas, it requires them to really think things through and process how they are thinking and feeling about something.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

All right. So let's talk about a specific issue to get an example. So this helps me, so when my kids were younger, I remember at times tantrums were an issue. I remember leaving more than one movie theater, um, with my, probably with both my kids. So what would getting input look like when you're addressing tantrums with like a five or a six year old?

BARBARA HOPKIN:

So tantrums with a five year, six year old, I would recommend using a recent tantrum. So bringing up the incident that recently happened, as an example, and asking them, "Would it be all right if we talked about what made you so upset at the movie theater the other day?" And then really actively listening to their response to help understand what was most concerning for them, help them make connections between their feelings and how their body was feeling at that time versus how their body feels when they're calm. Getting input is really an opportunity to become more aware of how your child is thinking and feeling.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

All right, so that makes sense. That six year old is now a 13, so I have a 13 year old now and a lot of what I'm dealing with centers around routines, and I've found that she's getting out the door a little bit later every day. So how would I get input around my teenager's morning routines?

BARBARA HOPKIN:

Mornings can be a wild time, that's for sure (laughs). So it sounds like she may already have a routine in the morning, but it just might need to be revisited a little bit. I would start by asking her what could we do to make our morning routine go smoothly and be out the door on time and really hear what she thinks. Ask her what is challenging about being ready on time and have her think through that? What could you do to make this challenge easier? So it's really gaining input, allowing her the chance to think through the morning and what she could do to improve it.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

So for her, I can feel that it would really create a sense of ownership in the outcome for her. And then, you know, when we were talking about the infants, I think that it helps me respond to those cues. So why in the process is this the first step?

BARBARA HOPKIN:

So it's the first step because it really helps for parents to correct any assumptions they may have about what's going on. They really hear the experience from their child's perspective. But it also builds confidence and conveys respect. And like you said, if she's really a part of the conversation, she has a lot more buy in and following too. It also gets her thinking, it gives her the ability to develop some new skills.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

So what should parents avoid when seeking input? Are there any, are there any pitfalls here that we need to be looking out for?

BARBARA HOPKIN:

You definitely want to seek input at a time when everyone's calm and well rested and not in a rush. It might even be the next day if you've had a really tough interaction or time with something. So just waiting for a moment when everyone is in a good place to talk is very important. Some of the parents I work with, if they've had something tough, go on such as a teenager coming home late, and they're feeling worried and upset, they'll even make sure their teen is okay, and then get a good night's sleep, really gather themselves and think about how they wanted to have this conversation before talking. And when they take that time to pause and wait for the right moment, the conversation ends up going a lot better.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

So I'm curious about some of the parents that you have been working with and just what you're hearing from parents about this step. Like I'd love to know, you know, what places are they getting stuck or what kind of successes are, are you hearing about?

BARBARA HOPKIN:

Sure. So I think one of the trickiest part for parents sometimes is they are busy and their kids are busy, so when they try to think of a time when no one's tired or hungry or in a rush, sometimes it can be hard to find that time. Some of the best input conversations I've heard about will involve the whole family over dinner. They'll be, for example, gaining input on how they'd like to handle chores in the house and over dinner where everyone's calm, everyone can participate in the conversation. The kids in the conversation can really open up and talk as a family. So finding that right time can be a little tricky, but when you are able to find it to gain input as a family, some really great things can come from it.

Another thing that some parents have talked about is if their child say, had a tantrum, they're hesitant to bring it back up later when their child is calm because they think, "Oh, we're past that, I don't wanna bring it up again." However, in being able to talk about it and hear from their child, what that was like for them, they really are helping to build their child's skills and make a positive plan for the future. So even though it can be tricky to wanna go there in the long run, it really pays off. There's one other thing that parents in this step talk about a lot is sometimes in their own family growing up, they didn't talk about feelings a lot, people didn't express feelings a lot, so it can feel a little bit unnatural at first to talk a lot about feelings. However, building that feelings vocabulary in children is so powerful in helping them process and navigate challenges throughout life. So, even though it can feel uncomfortable at first, talking about feelings is a huge piece of gaining input.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

Let's talk a little bit about step two. Step two is teaching. What is this and why is the step important?

BARBARA HOPKIN:

This step is really important because it's where you actually demonstrate how to do the task. So for infants, this step is important because by meeting their needs you are teaching them that they're safe and that others can be trusted. For children and teens, teaching is important because it equips them with knowledge and skills to do something new or different.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

So this step makes sense to me because as a parent, I often feel like I'm doing that a lot. I'm demonstrating, I'm demonstrating tasks for my children. And especially when they were younger, we are learning, you know, a lot of new skills. So is teaching just done through demonstrating or what are some other ways of teaching?

BARBARA HOPKIN:

So there's some different approaches. Demonstrating is one of them, also connecting and labeling, as well as modeling are all important pieces of teaching. So demonstrating a skill or a specific behavior can help your child visualize what you're asking them to do, and really think through it. Connecting a new skill to something that they already know and labeling it is also helpful for their confidence as they're learning something new. And then finally parents and those in a parenting role are always modeling behavior for their infant child or teen. So what you say and what you do are very powerful forms of teaching. So it's important to think about that and what you are teaching through what you say and do. Then kinda stepping back and asking yourself, "What behavior would you like your child to learn to replace an inappropriate behavior? What could you teach them to do instead of what they're doing, that's not working for you?" Can be a great place to start with teaching.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

So as you are explaining that I'm recognizing that teaching is different from telling. At teaching's core, it sounds like it's really about skill building.

BARBARA HOPKIN:

It is, it definitely is. And that's a common theme that comes up. It's hard not to get in the habit of just telling sometimes, but teaching is definitely a skill building event.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

So let's talk about the example that we used earlier about a younger child who is dealing with tantrums, what would you teach when wanting to address tantrums?

BARBARA HOPKIN:

So the very first thing to think about if your child is having a tantrum is focusing on calming yourself down first and then your child. So taking a parenting break really gives you the chance to respond rather than react to a tantrum or struggle. It also models the compound strategies that you're wanting your child to maybe try such as taking a deep breath or taking a walk or getting water. So it helps in two ways, the parent then is more calm, but the child has also seen their parent go through the calm down strategies.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

That makes sense.

BARBARA HOPKIN:

So, yeah, so then once the parent's in control of their own emotions, they have a chance to explore what's going on for their child emotionally. Then they can think about some things they maybe want to teach. For example, I statements are a great way for kids to feel awareness and express their emotions in a respectful way, or think about what coping strategies and calm down strategies they want to come up with in a list to practice, to build those emotional regulation skills that are so important. Then finally, another piece of teaching that is really helpful for kids is to really be involved and to think about how to repair harm done and to build responsibility for maintaining healthy relationships. So, really thinking about how to repair anything that didn't go so well.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

That makes sense. Tell me about how teaching might look different for a teen. How could I teach my 13 year old about routines?

BARBARA HOPKIN:

So as a parent of a teen, thinking of tasks and responsibilities that are age appropriate is important, and giving them feedback as far as tasks they are eager to learn in order to

gain independence is important. So thinking about what would they like to learn to be more responsible for can really help. Specifically, parents can model a task, so do what you would like them to do, and then ask your teen what, what they noticed. Then the teen can do the modeling and ask what they notice when they're doing their own modeling. Practice together and provide feedback starting with strengths first .

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

What are you hearing from parents on that step?

BARBARA HOPKIN:

So what I hear about this step is when parents really do take the time to teach, it really makes a big difference in their teen's success and confidence. So, one parent told me about wanting her teen to take responsibility for yard work and in really having her teen watch her mow the lawn, do the weed whacking, go through all the steps that she wanted to have done. Then when he was ready to model back for her, those responsibilities, it set him up for success. And then after she was able to watch him and have him talk about what he did and ask any questions he had, then he was really ready to do these chores more independently.

So if this step is skipped, there tends to be a lot less willingness for follow through. And this can be frustrating for both the child and the parent. And sometimes I think this stuff gets skipped because parents assume that their child knows how to complete a task that will meet their expectations, but this isn't always the case. So if that parent hadn't taken the time to teach her son how she wanted the yard work done, then he might have done it in a way that she ended up having to redo it or have him redo it and it would've been frustrating for them both.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

Oh, I see myself in that spot right there - if I would've just stopped and spent the time there that would've made, that would've made a lot of sense. So we've discussed, input and teach and the next is, practicing. So why is this important?

BARBARA HOPKIN:

So the practicing step is really important to create opportunities for kids to be able to try what they're learning. It's okay if they sometimes fail and then to repeat their efforts. So it's beneficial, 'cause it really builds their capacity to learn, improve, grow habits, grow social and emotional skills, and it supports a growth mindset, which is huge. It also gives you an opportunity to handle feedback and help them correct mistakes, and that growth mindset piece is big because even if things are challenging as they practice, if you're able to help them think through those in a positive way with positive self talk, then they'll be able to take on challenges in the future with a positive attitude towards overcoming them.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

So like we heard in the previous steps, I'm sure that practicing looks different depending on the age of your child. So what this, what does this look like for infants?

BARBARA HOPKIN:

So for infants, the focus is on creating conditions to support their success and practice at this age requires more teaching. For children, the focus is around making sure there are times and opportunities to practice. So you might intentionally schedule activities so that your child has a chance to interact and engage with other kids, and problem solve and cooperate together. For teens you'll want to have them take steps to meet their big challenges and take responsibility for their own relationships, healthy risk taking allows them to grow confidence and be able to take on future challenges.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

So I was just thinking that creating the conditions so they can practice that is something maybe I think I rush at times. It seems like the parent needs to be intentional about creating an opportunity to practice. So tell me more about what that looks like. We'll go back to the tantrums example for a child. So what, what does practice look like for a child that is dealing with tantrums?

BARBARA HOPKIN:

So for a child dealing with tantrums, they could, they're gonna be working on strategies so they can deal with their big feelings. This is a time for them to practice using the strategies that you taught them in step two of teaching. So if taking deep breaths was a strategy, then this is the time to practice using Teddy bear breathing is, is on the website and it's where they take one of their stuffed animals and put it on their belly and they breathe so deeply that they take the animal for a ride or if they're blowing out candles breathing, pretending to blow out candles on a birthday cake, but it's really giving them the chance to practice the skills that you taught, and asking them what they could do to help themselves feel better. It's super important to recognize their effort as they try to use the strategy. So you might say, "I noticed how you asked for space when you got frustrated, and allowed yourself to calm down and that is great." So it's giving them a chance to practice all the things you worked so hard to teach them.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

So for a parent or someone in a parenting role of an older child working on routines, what does practicing look like there?

BARBARA HOPKIN:

So if you're working on a routine with an older child, it's important to practice it when there's not a rush and no pressure at that point to be out the door on time. So they may need reminders such as, "Show me that you can use the checklist that we made to follow your routine, to get ready for school. Show me the next step on your morning checklist." So once they've had a chance to feel really successful and responsible for

completing the routine a few times before needing to be out the door at a specific time, then they will be prepared to leave on time when they need to be somewhere specific like school. So practicing at a time when they're not in a rush really sets you up for success when there is a time crunch.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

So I'm, I'm just seeing that I underestimate the power of practicing already. What about, what are you hearing from other parents that you're working with?

BARBARA HOPKIN:

So I think that underestimating piece of the power of practicing happens pretty frequently. Parents tend to move on too quickly, so they'll come up with a great plan. They'll gain input, say for keeping the house picked up and the kids will know exactly what they're supposed to do. They've taught where everything goes, they're, they're off to a great start and everyone's excited at first, so they stick to the routine. However, if it's not practiced and it doesn't become a habit in a couple of weeks when I talk with parents again, they'll say, "You know what, it went great at first and now we're just not really doing it. We it's not, it didn't stick."

And so taking that time to practice really helps it not become something you just did for a few weeks, but more of a habit. I've heard parents really gain a lot from taking the time to talk to their kids about feelings. If you practice this and you practice engaging with them about how they're feeling, it becomes a way of communicating naturally rather than something you have to intentionally think about each time. So the more you can practice the different things that you're working on, the more that they just become natural for both parents and kids, and can really stick as a lasting habit.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

So we've talked about the first three steps, getting input, teaching and practicing, and the next is support. What does support do?

BARBARA HOPKIN:

So support really reinforces your child's ability to be successful in growing their skills. It grows cause and effect thinking, it reinforces their ability to be successful and grows social and emotional skills for both children and parents.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

So help me understand what that looks like for a parent of an infant.

BARBARA HOPKIN:

So for a parent and of an infant, you're really working hard to create an environment that they feel safe to explore using all five of their senses, and really get into the world around them.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

Okay. What about, parents of children and teens? What does support look like there?

BARBARA HOPKIN:

So support for children and teens includes reinforcing their ability to be successful and helping them grow their skills. So you might be coaching them, you might be providing feedback. You might have to go back and reteach something that isn't going so well. You monitor how things are going, and then at times you'll follow through by applying a logical consequence. If it seems as if they know exactly what to do, you have their input, you practice, but they're making choices not to follow through, then logical consequences can be a big piece, as you reflect on how things are going in this step.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

Okay. So, what happens if, for example, my teen is getting home late?

BARBARA HOPKIN:

This is a big one that causes lots of worries for parents. Yes. So if teens are getting home late, before attempting to correct behavior, ask them if they're okay, ask them what happened and how they're feeling. It can be easy to just come across as angry, especially if you've been scared, but taking the time to connect with them first, find out how they're feeling, find out what really happened, can make a big difference. Let them know that you were worried and that you love them, then talk about a logical consequence and problem solve how to make sure that they're home on time the next night that they're out and about.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

I feel like I've covered everything that's happened from like Friday night to Saturday morning so far (laughing) asking my own, uh, questions with the parenting coach, which is awesome. But let's talk about what supporting looks like for that kiddo with tantrums. How would you, how do you provide support in a situation like that?

BARBARA HOPKIN:

So in the previous steps, you've, we've talked about practicing strategies to help them cope with their big feelings during a tantrum. So during the support step, your focus as a parent will be on reteaching. So it might be going back and reteaching that belly breath or reteaching to step away and get a drink of water or take a break. You're monitoring how things are going, you're coaching them and encouraging them and then applying logical consequences if they're not able to follow through. These are done through asking key questions to support their skills. For example, you might say, "Remember the tools we talked about using when you were getting upset." It also might mean that the tools you came up with are working at home, but let's say they're not working at school. So then you can re-engage with them to talk about what skills to cope and calm down

they could use at school and practice those together. So really thinking about different environments, how things are going and going back to reteach and regroup when necessary.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

So I am looking back on my former self as a mom and thinking of my movie theater example (laughs) and my tantrums. So I am not working on the support step right as I walked out of the theater with my screaming kiddo, is that right? Like I'm support should happen when I'm, when I'm calm and when I'm home-

BARBARA HOPKIN:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

... and back in a space that's more familiar. Is that what I'm hearing you say?

BARBARA HOPKIN:

Absolutely. So it's a chance to take a step back and have a conversation. It's similar, what we did in the previous step, where you said, "How are you feeling about how that happened?"

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

BARBARA HOPKIN:

"What was getting you so upset." So waiting until you have a chance to revisit the bump in the road, when you're calm and then practice or reteach, whatever didn't go well for a plan for the next time.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

So for the littles, it's really about, you know, reteaching, monitoring, coaching, applying logical consequences, but is that the same thing for my teen and her early morning routine issue?

BARBARA HOPKIN:

It-it's very similar. So there are still ways that you can offer support. You do need to be a little careful because teens tend to initiate a fight if they feel that you view them as not competent. So if they feel that you're kind of taking that away from them, it might spark a fight. Um, but staying engaged, asking key questions and applying logical consequences that really support the learning process can help with this. You wanna make sure that you're empowering them to fully implement the task. So kind of turning

that around, if they don't feel confident, it might engage a fight. So figure out how to support them in feeling confident and it will go better.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

So what, what are you hearing from other parents on this step? Are they, again, are they... Where are they getting? I can see where I'm getting stuck (laughs). Where are they getting stuck or what successes are you hearing about?

BARBARA HOPKIN:

A lot of parents are really interested in learning more about logical consequences-

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

BARBARA HOPKIN:

... which, um, there's lots of resources for on the website. But having options rather than just sending their kids to their room or having a timeout is really powerful for parents. I've also had parents that will have really great input conversations with their children about what logical consequences could be. And it's interesting to hear what kids will come up with in that realm of what their logical consequence might be for something. And sometimes kids are more harsh than the logical consequence their parent might come up with. So they might say, "I didn't pick up my room, so now I think I need to pick up the whole house." That can lead to a really healthy conversation. Um, and I think also in this step, it's important to remember that the five steps of the process are fluid. You might revisit gaining input or reteach something and practice something new. It doesn't always follow steps, one through five in order. You're, you-you're moving throughout the steps as it feels appropriate and necessary.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

Let's talk about, and just cover the last step, which is recognize just to get an understanding of what that is. So what, what does it mean to recognize?

BARBARA HOPKIN:

The recognition step is so important. It's all about intentionally acknowledging the effort your child makes no matter how small. So really making sure that you recognize what they're doing to change.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

So I would imagine that intentionally acknowledging my child's effort and success really would help grow our relationship. Like I'm thinking my voice is really loud the days that she's not getting out the door, but I don't know if I'm recognizing the days that she's getting out the door on time (laughs). So-

BARBARA HOPKIN:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

... in addition to that piece, which I feel like I've just walked into right now, what else does recognition do?

BARBARA HOPKIN:

It really helps to build that positive relationship because between parenting and their children, it also helps grow their motivation to wanna keep making positive choices in the right direction. It builds their self confidence and their self-esteem and it grows their social and emotional skills. So it does a lot of positive to be able to recognize their effort. So recognition can sound like, "I see that you are really putting a lot of effort into getting out the door. That's awesome, thank you." It might be a hug or a high five, or a fist bump, it doesn't have to be, all verbal.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

What about for infants? Like how would you... We've been kinda using this example for infants and then the young, you know, the older kiddos, but how do you recognize effort for an infant?

BARBARA HOPKIN:

So for an infant, you might say, "I see that you're putting a lot of effort into rolling over. I see you're working so hard on that next step." So you just verbally tell them what you see them doing.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

And then I'm assuming it's still the hugs and the, the snuggling that comes with that too.

BARBARA HOPKIN:

Absolutely, yes.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

So the five year old, the tan... You know, we're working on the tantrums, what would recognition have looked like there?

BARBARA HOPKIN:

So with the tantrums, you really wanna focus on effort. So it should be simple and specific and honest. It's most effective if it's done soon after she demonstrated the skill. So, as soon as you see her be able to take a step back and practice a coping skill, that's a time to acknowledge and recognize that positive behavior so that she associates that

behavior with the recognition. So if you notice her getting frustrated when playing with some friends, but then she took a step back, you saw her take a deep breath. You might say, "I noticed when you got frustrated with your friends, you walked away and took some deep breaths, that was excellent."

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

So, simple and specific. I think my 13 year old would appreciate that. So I might recognize that she got her backpack ready the night before and you know, it was maybe laid out her clothes for the morning, or are there any things that we wanna avoid when providing recognition?

BARBARA HOPKIN:

Yes. So one trap that it's easy for parents to fall into is bribing. So a bribe is a promise for behavior. Well, as whereas praise is special attention after the behavior. So for example, if you said, "You know, if you're on time out the door every morning, this week are going to get some allowance." That would be a bribe versus really taking the time to recognize her effort to be on time throughout the week and then maybe on Friday, you got out the door on time, so you to celebrate on the way to school somehow with an extra song or a hot chocolate, that would be more of the recognition and the praise after the fact.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

What are you hearing from your parents that you're working with on this, um, on this step?

BARBARA HOPKIN:

Well, I really hear the, the piece we were just discussing about getting stuck on wanting to offer an allowance or money for completing chores and things like that. It can seem really motivating to kids and initially they, they will buy into that, but to instill that lasting motivation and that internal motivation, it's, it's better to go with the praise route and the recognition route. It also just seems more natural for some families to point out those positives than for others. So getting comfortable and really looking for the little things to celebrate and the little things to appreciate and recognize can be a shift in thinking, but it can really be motivating and create a lot of healthy interactions for everyone. I'm thinking of one mom who really recognized how much she was appreciating spending time with her son and she let him know how much that meant to her. So then he went out of his way to bring chairs and set up the space for them to spend some time together that she hadn't known about. It's amazing how... Yes, how, how far recognizing can go for increasing motivation for behavior.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

What happens if you skip a step?

BARBARA HOPKIN:

A lot of parents ask this. They, they, sometimes may feel a lot of pressure. "Oh my goodness. I have to do step one and two and three and four and five and it's a lot. And what do I say here?" But I think taking a step back and being patient with yourself as a parent, knowing that you're gonna pick up bits and pieces of each step and work on them as it feels appropriate and not being afraid to think, "Oh, you know, I gained input and I thought I taught the skills and we had this great plan, but it's a disaster. We need to go back and gain a little more input and reteach," and that's okay. So I think one of the things I've noticed in working with parents that I've really appreciated and, and loved is if using in the process makes you more aware of the way that you speak with your children, of the way you interact with your children, of the things you appreciate about your children, if you have a greater awareness to take that step back and be mindful of how you're handling things, the steps kind of naturally slowly fall into place. That awareness and the intentionality that come with the process as you practice it, make a huge difference in relationships, in communication in a healthy way, and can really make, um, parenting successes all of a sudden stand out and, and parents will say, "Oh, I didn't even realize I was doing that, but I didn't send her to her room. And we had a great conversation and I took a break first, and I'm really proud of how I handled that." I've worked with some parents who will have someone else in their life recognize, "I love how you handled that situation with your child." And they might even realize that they were using the process, but as they practice and become more comfortable, all of a sudden they're doing it, maybe not perfectly and an order every day, but it's working for them in the moment.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

So for a parent that is, um, on the fence about printing out a tool and giving this a try, what, what would you say to them?

BARBARA HOPKIN:

I would say just starting slow and even trying to gain some input and have a good conversation with about whatever topic might be a struggle in their house, have a conversation with their child and just see where that goes might be a, be something that makes them wanna learn a little more, or even just trying to recognize the positives that they do see. 'Cause it's so easy to focus on the things that aren't going well, but if they can focus on what is going and recognize those, it might, they might see enough of a reaction from their child to wanna learn more.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

So at the end of the day, this seems like, um, stronger communication and a better relationship would be, would be the outcome. Are those the benefits that you see to using the process?

BARBARA HOPKIN:

Absolutely. I feel like the stronger relationship piece is huge for parents and kids to feel good about how things are handled, to feel proud of interactions and not end the day thinking, "Oh, I wish I, I hadn't lost my temper there," to have some tools and a process to use in order to be able to respond rather than react when communicating just makes a huge difference I think in how parents feel about the way things are handled and their own confidence at the end of the day.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

What if... You know, my daughter is 13, so what if I'd never used the process before? Is it too late to start?

BARBARA HOPKIN:

Absolutely not. Some of the biggest successes I'm thinking of for parents in my mind are kind of reconnecting with their teens and preteens and reengaging with them because I've heard from parents that there's a shift as, as kids turn into teens and preteens, they might not quite engage the same way. They don't talk as deeply as naturally about things. It seems like the things they used to do together and enjoy doing together aren't interesting to them anymore. So taking the time to reconnect and rethink about things you can do together to build your relationship and ways you can talk to get your teen to open up a little more, will really set you up for, um, a lifetime of positive communication and strong relationships. So it's definitely not too late at any point to work on the process.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

And I'm assuming that if you, you are starting at any point, if you, if you didn't have a strong relationship to begin with, that using the process could be a way to facilitate better communication in a stronger relationship. Do you think that's true?

BARBARA HOPKIN:

That's absolutely true. I feel like u-using the process, because there is such an emphasis on listening and hearing each other out and identifying feelings and problem solving together, which then results in more buy in from, um, the child or teen, it really does give you a chance to work on positive communication and relationship so that when you come through a challenge at the end, you look back and, and realize, "Oh, that actually brought us closer," rather than, "Oh, that was hard and we're further apart now."

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

Anything else, anything else that you wanna share today as we wrap up our conversation?

BARBARA HOPKIN:

I would just say that one of the things I have loved most as a coach about the process is hearing parents really be more aware of their parenting and of the ways that they would like to interact with their kids. Knowing that none of us are perfect as parents and there's tough days, but at the end of the day, if they're more aware and they're able to take that break in order to handle things in a way that strengthens the relationship and conveys respect and teaches their children some skills, it just really is an amazing thing to hear. a process to follow, to build relationships and communication skills really sets kids up for positive things in their future.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

So thank you so much, Barbara, for joining me today. I appreciate you sharing your stories and your wisdom today. So thank you so much for being here.

BARBARA HOPKIN:

Thank you so much for having me, I loved talking about the process.

ANNMARIE MCMAHILL:

So a key takeaway from what I heard today is to be patient with yourself and to keep practicing. This way of interacting with your child takes practice and it's through practice that skills are learned and strengthened. I've also heard that the parenting process is fluid and revisiting steps multiple times is normal and expected. As parents we're successful when we engage in the parenting process with our children, regardless of the outcome, engaging in the parenting process with your child might not lead to the immediate result or the exact outcome we desire but every time we engage in the process, we're building our child's skills to be successful.

We're creating an environment for learning where our children are able to practice and grow their social and emotional skills. For more information on the parenting process for your child's success, check out our resource titled, Parenting Process for Your Child's Success and our Printable Graphic of the process in the, "I Want to Know More" section of ParentingMontana.org. In addition, you can find a how-to video and a few wrap cards of the same name in the media section of the website. Thank you for joining us today, and keep checking back for additional podcasts, tools and resources being continuously added to ParentingMontana.org.

41.25 VOICEOVER

The ParentingMontana.org podcast is produced by the Center for Health and Safety Culture at Montana State University in collaboration with the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Service and is brought to you by the Offices of Child Care, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, and Montana Department of Public Health and Human Service.

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42:26 END