

Parenting Tools:

- Teasing -



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Parenting Tools: Teasing

Dealing with Teasing

Teasing—whether your child is the one being teased or the one doing the teasing, it is important to understand the many reasons why children tease others. Many children tease for the attention. Teasing is a good way of receiving negative attention. Unfortunately, for many children, negative attention is better than no attention. Some children model or mimic what is happening to them at home by acting the same way to others at school or in the neighborhood. These kids who tease are children who may be teased by siblings or who experience aggressive or harsh parenting. Many kids who tease have low self-esteem and feel superior when they put others down. They may experience much power when teasing upsets others. It is not uncommon to see children engage in teasing behavior because they may perceive it as being the “cool” thing to do. It may help them feel like part of a group. The need to belong may be so strong that a child may tease others to be accepted by the “popular” kids.

A lack of understanding of “differences” is the underlying factor in some teasing. Many children are not familiar with or do not understand cultural or ethnic differences. A child with a physical impairment or a learning disability may be the target of teasing because he is different. Some kids judge or criticize anyone who is different instead of trying to learn or understand what makes another special. One cannot discuss the reasons why children tease without acknowledging the powerful influence of the media. Our children are frequently exposed to teasing, put-downs, sarcasm, and a lack of respect in many of the TV shows geared toward them.

Strategies for Dealing with Teasing

We cannot control what others say to our children. However, our children can learn to control their own reactions. Parents can teach their children a few simple strategies listed below that will empower them and reduce feelings of helplessness.

Ignore the teasing. Explain to your child how displays of anger or tears often invite more teasing. Therefore, it is often effective for children to ignore the person teasing them. Your child should not look at or respond to the person. If possible, encourage your child to walk away from the person doing the teasing. Try to role-play “ignoring” with your children. Praise children for their excellent “acting.” It should be noted that ignoring might not be effective in prolonged teasing situations.

Visualize the words bouncing off. Many young children respond well to the practice of visualizing negative words “bouncing off” of them. It provides kids with the concrete image of not having to accept or believe what is said. Showing how Nerf balls bounce off a person can create this image. Another effective visualization is for a child to pretend he has a shield around him that helps the hurtful or bad words bounce off. Again, this gives children the message that they can refuse these put-downs.

Agree with the facts. Explain to your child how agreeing with the facts can be one of the easiest ways to handle an insult or tease. Here are two examples of agreeing with the facts:

Insult: “You have so many freckles!” **Response: “Yes, I have a lot of freckles.”**

Insult: “You are such a cry baby....” **Response: “I do cry easily.”**

Agreeing with facts usually eliminates the feeling of wanting to hide the freckles or the tears. Ask “So?” The response of “So?” conveys indifference to the person doing the teasing and lets that person know that the tease doesn’t matter. Children can find this technique simple yet quite effective.

There are so many lessons our children can learn from a situation that involves teasing. Whether we are teaching our children not to tease or we are teaching them how to handle being teased, our goal is to help them realize that everyone is loved and has value to God. He loved us so much that he died for us, every one of us (John 3:16; Ephesians 1:4; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 5:8; John 1:12). A situation that involves teasing is also a good time to teach that we are to love our enemies and even pray for them. In Matthew 5:44–46 Jesus says, “But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?”

Remind your children we can all be nice to those who are nice to us, but our love for Jesus shines through when we are nice to those who treat us unfairly. In times of trouble, always remind them to cast their cares upon the Lord. Philippians 4:6–7 says, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” Jesus is always the answer!