



The Power of Respect: Name Calling

“...they sometimes end up calling each other names.”

“In this column the reader is offered practical, respectful options leading to win-win solutions to the problems arising between adults and children in everyday life.”

Q: When my children have disagreements they sometimes end up calling each other names. I don't like that, but I don't want to get involved in their fights; I really want them to work things out between themselves. What can I do so that we all "win?"

N.H., Garberville

A: First I would ask what do they want? I would need that information before I could answer this question. The point of win-win agreements is not that this is good or this is bad, but that all the people involved feel good about the agreement.

Perhaps they don't mind being called names by each other. If you don't mind, as long as they don't mind, then that would take care of that. If you still mind, then this is an issue for discussion and negotiation.

Perhaps they want your help to work out their conflicts. Maybe this is one of the times they really do want your attention and help. If that's okay with you, then no problem.

If you really do not want to be in the middle of their conflicts, then here, too, is another opportunity for you all to find an agreeable solution.

Perhaps the solutions they come up with do not feel satisfying to all of them. If this is the case, then you can offer to help them learn ways to work out their problems so they would all feel good about it.

If they like this idea, then maybe for a while you could participate in their conflicts as a facilitator, helping when they ask for help and/or offering to help when they seem to be getting stuck.

When you decide to find out exactly what they do want, first, find a time that is agreeable for all of you. Then to make sure that you clearly understand their needs, tell them what you have understood and ask if that is correct.

If you decide that some negotiation is in order, explain your needs and point of view, and be sure that they understand what you mean. Sometimes this clear communication is enough and the problems seem to solve themselves.

However, sometimes the brainstorming for solutions, and negotiating takes more time and energy than you want to give it.

But it seems more agreeable and efficient to put in the time and energy up front finding win-win solutions, than to put it in later listening to the name calling that you don't like, or being dragged into arguments when you'd rather be working in the garden.

Not only that, with more practice this process becomes almost automatic. You automatically take each other into account. Since you are used to finding win-win solutions, as soon as you realize there is a need for this, people start offering solutions and usually, quickly, a suitable one is found.

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