

Adults get lesson in love

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How do you get an angry kid into a car seat?

Does he really hate you?

These riddles and others fueled a torrent of parents and teachers tired of temper tantrums to drop the weekend routine and head to school.

For two hours Saturday morning, an estimated 250 people filled in the auditorium at Modesto High School to hear a free presentation on how to handle little rascals still pushing their fifth birthdays.

"We're here to talk about discipline. When we talk to parents and teachers, one of the top three things we hear is always discipline," said Laurie Prusso, a child development instructor at Modesto Junior College.

Prusso delivered the presentation called "If It's Not Positive, It's Not Discipline!" offered by the Stanislaus County Cares Project and the Stanislaus County children and Families Commission. She also has six children.

Sandy Van Houten of Modesto, who attended the seminar, has eight. "I thought it would be good to just get some new ideas. It always helps," said Van Houten, 46, with 8-year-old Jena and 10-year-old Todd in toe.

The trick, Prusso told the crowd, is to "grow up together," "to have fun together" and to make sure that love is the underscored point.

That starts when little ones are still in their highchairs. It comes into play when they first bolt out the door and into the street. And it applies during the temper tantrums.

"Have your kids ever said to you, 'I hate you?'" How do you feel when that happens? Angry? Hurt?" Prusso asked at least 100 people with raised hands. "That is a child saying 'I'm really hurt, and I don't feel like I have any control over what is happening.' They don't know how to say that. They don't know how to say 'I am very overwhelmed.' They just say 'I hate you.' When parents can recognize that, it is such a good thing."

Parents don't have to react. Prusso said instead of forbidding outbursts, parents can let the "little volcanoes" erupt.

And they were erupting Saturday, all right.



Jess Forest, 9, has fun expressing to Laurie Prusso what is bugging him.

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Kathleen Du Bose of Modesto tried to listen while letting her 4-year-old son Zeke express his displeasure at being strapped in his stroller. She gave up a few minutes before the end of the presentation; Zeke wanted to leave.

Sometimes, though, kids just have to learn to go with the flow, Prusso said. Making them take a trip to the grocery store can be made into a fun event by suggesting the kids plan the menu for dinner, she said.

"I like what she said about mixing discipline with love," Du Bose, 50, said, before going to the car with her son. "When you are trying to put a child in a car seat and they don't want to go in, well then, that's too bad. You just put them in there and lock them in and then give them a kiss."

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AT A GLANCE

Tips from child development instructor Laurie Prusso

- Send a message of love to children whenever possible. When a child makes a hazardous move such as jetting out into a street, a parent can discipline and be loving at the same time by explaining how worried the parent was rather than chastising the child.
- Keep a 'relationship piggy bank' with a strong balance. Deposits are made up of loving actions that are warmly received by children. Think of discipline as a necessary withdrawal from the piggy bank.
- When a child is doing something irritating such as kicking the tray to a highchair or refusing to eat something, stop to think about what a child is saying. Such actions can be their 'language,' for explaining they are bored and need to get out of the highchair or that something they are being asked to eat disagrees with their taste or stomach.
- When necessary, verbalize that something 'bugs' you. Build mutual respect by encouraging children to use the same term with family members.
- Remember to have fun. Even helping kids do homework and chores can be turned into an enjoyable activity.
- Routines and rituals such as a weekly family dinner, story time or movie night anchor children and instill a sense of consistency and predictability. They also tend to form lasting childhood memories.