

Chemical Education Specialists

Lee Soderlind, B.A., LADC
Kirsten Dawson, M.A.

Counselors

Joey Kellogg, M.S.
Deanna Lilienthal, M.A.
Monica Potter, M.A.

Counselors

Mary Oppegaard, M.A.
Pamela A. Anderson, M.A.
Angela DeNardo Meagher, M.A.
Joy Wedan, M.S.
Heidi Wessman, M.A.
Sarah Kelly, M.A.

Counselors

Rebecca Pingel, M.A.
Ana Carter, MBA
Tami Langlois, M.A.
Katy Berglund, M.A.
Sara Belleau, M.A.
Judi Bryant, M.A.

Muffins and Oranges

Here is another food related story about parenting. Last month we talked about how a parent who gives advice to a teenager while he is cooking spaghetti might inadvertently insult him and make things worse rather than better. This month's article is inspired by a real or imagined daily (late afternoon) battle between eating a muffin or an orange.

It is 3:00 and we could go for a muffin, or perhaps an orange. If we have the muffin or the orange, the difference will not be noticeable that day. However, after a year or two, the difference between having a daily muffin or an orange will be very noticeable, perhaps twenty pounds noticeable.

How could something that is virtually imperceptible while it is happening, turn into something very perceptible? And what does this have to do with parenting?

Let us say we are with our children and they are being challenging. Perhaps they are talking back to us, whining about how unfair something is, or lying about the half-finished donut we found under their bed ("It's not mine, you can't prove it"). If we are at the top of our game, we forgive them for what they are doing before we respond and then proceed to discipline with reassurance and protect the connection, understanding that children act this way from time to time. "That hurts my ears when you talk to me like that and when my ears hurt I won't drive you anywhere for a few days. Dinner in five minutes." Or: "Your consequence for

eating in your room without permission is no screens this week.” And we say it in our best adult voice, the same voice we use with our neighbors, in-laws and co-workers.

If we are not at the top of our game, we might speak to them harshly, disrespectfully or arrogantly. “How many times do I have to tell you not to talk to me like that?” Perhaps said in the same kind of voice they are using that we want them to stop. “Quit lying to me! Do you think I am going to fall for your lies?”

On any given day, the difference between one parenting approach and another is imperceptible, just the same as the difference between eating a muffin and an orange on any give day is imperceptible. But over a year or two, if we have too many days when we parent without regard to the core principles (protect the connection, forgive instantly, discipline with reassurance, celebrate mistakes and disappointments, honor sovereignty, as discussed in my parenting book: *Insightful Parenting: Making Moments Count*) we will inadvertently contribute to the gradual erosion of intimacy between parent and child.

To thank you for subscribing to these articles about parenting, (and in time for Mother’s Day) the book can be purchased at a 40% discount from my Website, www.drstevekahn.com. Just enter “subscriber” in the coupon box. And the shipping cost is the same for one or more than one book.

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