





Strategies for Parents: Connecting with Our Kids

Dan Savage



©2023 All Rights Reserved. Loudoun County Public
Schools.





4 Powers

- Power of Perception
- Power of Attention
- Power of Unity
- Power of Free Will



Breathe Work

- The quickest way to our internal state
- Natural
- What are you putting in?
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bF_1ZiFta-E



What do our children need?

- Safety
 - What does this mean to you?
- Connection
 - What does this mean to you?



OUR CORE COMPONENTS



Problem-solving, through changing our response to conflict and upgrading social-emotional skills, boosts adults' and children's ability to adapt to changing situations (resiliency).



Connection, through creating a equitable School Family culture, motivates adults' and children's willingness to engage in healthy relationships, help each other be successful and change perceptions about conflict.



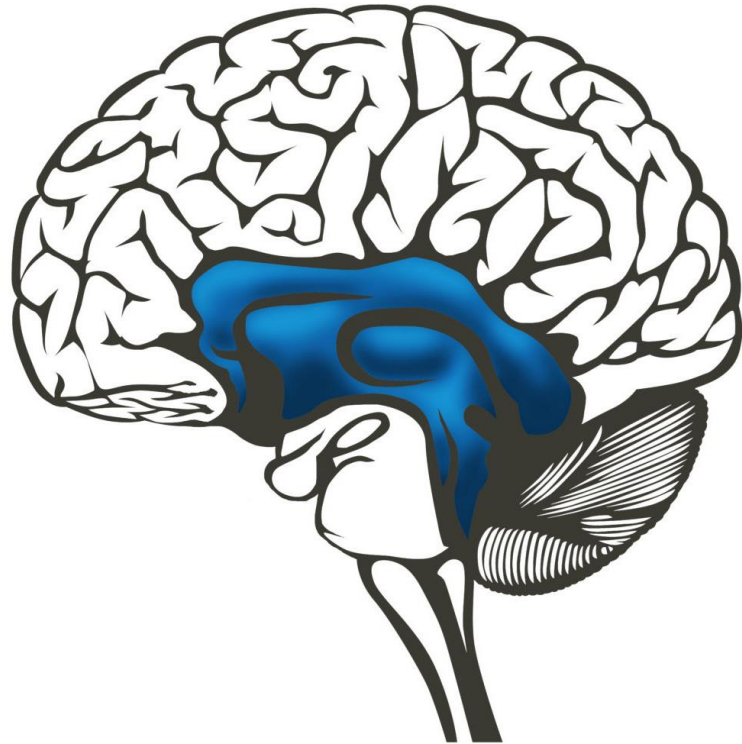
Safety, through self-regulation, enhances adults' and children's ability to recognize and manage physiological and emotional upset.

Survival State



Am I safe?

Emotional State



Am I loved?

Executive State



What can I learn?

	Survival State	Emotional State	Executive State
Belief	I am under attack I am not safe	I am not loved/valued/respected /appreciated	I am safe enough/loved enough /capable enough
Emotions	Anxiety, anger, fear, terror, hopelessness, depression	Sadness, hurt, frustration, irritation, disappointment, guilt, helpless	Calm, peaceful, coherent, grateful, content
Behaviors	Physical aggression, screaming, withdrawal, run	Social aggression, name calling, victim, guilt, manipulation	Goal directed, problem solving, solution oriented
Awareness	Unconscious	Unconscious	Conscious
Free Will	Physical reactive, instinctual dan, stimulus- reaction	Verbally reactive, preprogrammed cd-rom, stimulus reaction	Conscious choice, stimulus-pause- response
Questions	Am I Safe?	Am I Loved?	What can I learn from this?
Need	Safety	Connection	Problem solving in social setting
Discipline style	Threats, spanking, fear me	Bribes, manipulation, rewards and punishments, guilt, please me	Intrinsic motivation model, cd

Power of Perception





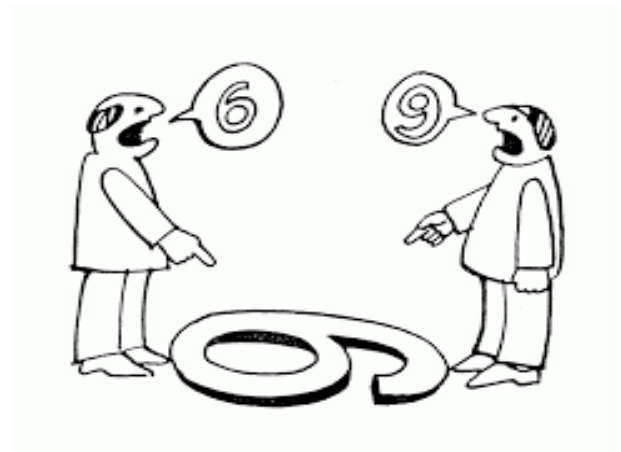






Big Idea

- Our perception defines who we believe we are, how we believe our interactions with others should go, and how we believe the world should operate
- Our *perception* of an experience creates our feelings about it, not the event itself. In turn, our feelings determine our behavior (our reaction to any situation).
 - **Perception → Feelings → Behaviors**
- **Trauma**



Reclaiming Your Power

- Reclaim your power and model self-control by:
 - Avoiding “make me” language. Instead, say something like, *“I feel frustrated when I arrive to work late. I need your help in the morning to get out the door on time. Will you help me?”*
 - Shifting your energy from “making children behave” to **connecting with children** and helping them be successful.
- **This is how you reclaim your power, model self-control and teach children to respect authority. Accepting that you are alone responsible for your upset is the first step toward permanent behavior change—for you and for the children in your care.**
- Next, you must learn to recognize and manage your perceptions. This gives you the power to *choose* how you respond to challenging situations
- You reclaim your power by giving it up
 - This is not helpless, it’s empowering

Can we choose our perception?

- We want to choose a healthy perception so we can respond, rather than react, to what life brings.
- You can't choose how to perceive a situation unless you're *aware* of your perception.
 - Changing your perception and mental models requires consciousness.

4 Steps to Help Choose our Perception

1. Notice that you're triggered. Pause.
 - a. Signs that you are in this unconscious state include:
 - i. Tightening in throat, Tightening in chest, Holding your breath, Experiencing loss of energy
 - ii. Inability to focus
 - iii. Using defensive humor/sarcasm
 - iv. Certainty that you are right and everyone else is wrong
2. Change your state from upset to calm.
 - a. When you recognize these signs, catch yourself. Pause before saying or doing anything. Take a few deep breaths. Remind yourself, *"I'm safe. Keep breathing. I can handle this."*
3. Change your perception from negative to positive.
 - a. The goal is to see others in a positive light so we can access the higher centers of our brain, giving us the power of choice and the ability to behave and model in a healthy manner.
4. Choose a helpful response instead of a hurtful reaction.

Power of Attention



Whatever we focus on, we get more of.



WE'RE WORKING SO HARD BECAUSE WE'RE
TRYING TO DO IT BACKWARDS.

Change the state
first.
Change the behavior
second.



Power of Attention

- You can consciously choose to focus your attention on what you truly value.
- Consider your home, and/or relationships:
 - Do you focus on hurtful or helpful behavior?
 - Do you emphasize problems or solutions?
 - Do you tell children what not to do, or do you teach them what *to* do instead?
- When you focus on punishing hurtful behavior instead of teaching helpful behavior, you will see more hurtfulness. When you spend more time talking about problems than finding solutions, you'll get more problems.

Why do we tend to focus on what we don't want?

- The primary function of your brain is safety. Because the structures of your brain are constantly scanning the environment for threats, your instinct is to focus on what is going wrong
- When you're in a **survival** or **emotional state**, your brain goes into defensive mode. It puts all its energy into alerting you to the danger and stopping the threat
- There's no energy left for solving the problem! And as long as your attention is focused on the problem (or threat), it's not open to a solution
- When you're upset, you're always focused on what you don't want. Once you're calm, you can reach your **executive state** and access the skills you need to focus on what you want and find solutions.



The Power of Attention with Children

- If we want children to be successful, we must learn to focus on the positive actions we want them to use. It isn't easy. We're accustomed to saying:
 - Don't run.
 - Stop hitting.
 - Don't touch that!
 - Why are your toys all over the floor?
 - You know you're not supposed to say that word!
- Misbehavior indicates that a skill is missing. When we use the phrases above, we aren't teaching children a better way. We aren't providing them with any new skills or tools.
 - Think if someone were to do that to you
- Now, instead of simply telling you not to say, "Do not," use descriptive language to focus on what you want the child to do.



ONE ESSENTIAL SKILL

- Predicts children's academic success and life happiness
- Allows delay of gratification
- Empowers to set goals and achieve them despite obstacles
- Creates and sustains healthy relationships
- Develops empathy and problem solving peacefully
- Holds true to life values



Skill of Assertiveness

- Emerges from the Power of Attention
- Sets boundaries in our life
 - Appropriate
 - Safe
 - Permissible
- Teaches us when and how to say “no” and “yes” in our lives
- Allows you to express yourself needs constructively
- Teaches our children and us how to set limits
- It is how we teach respect

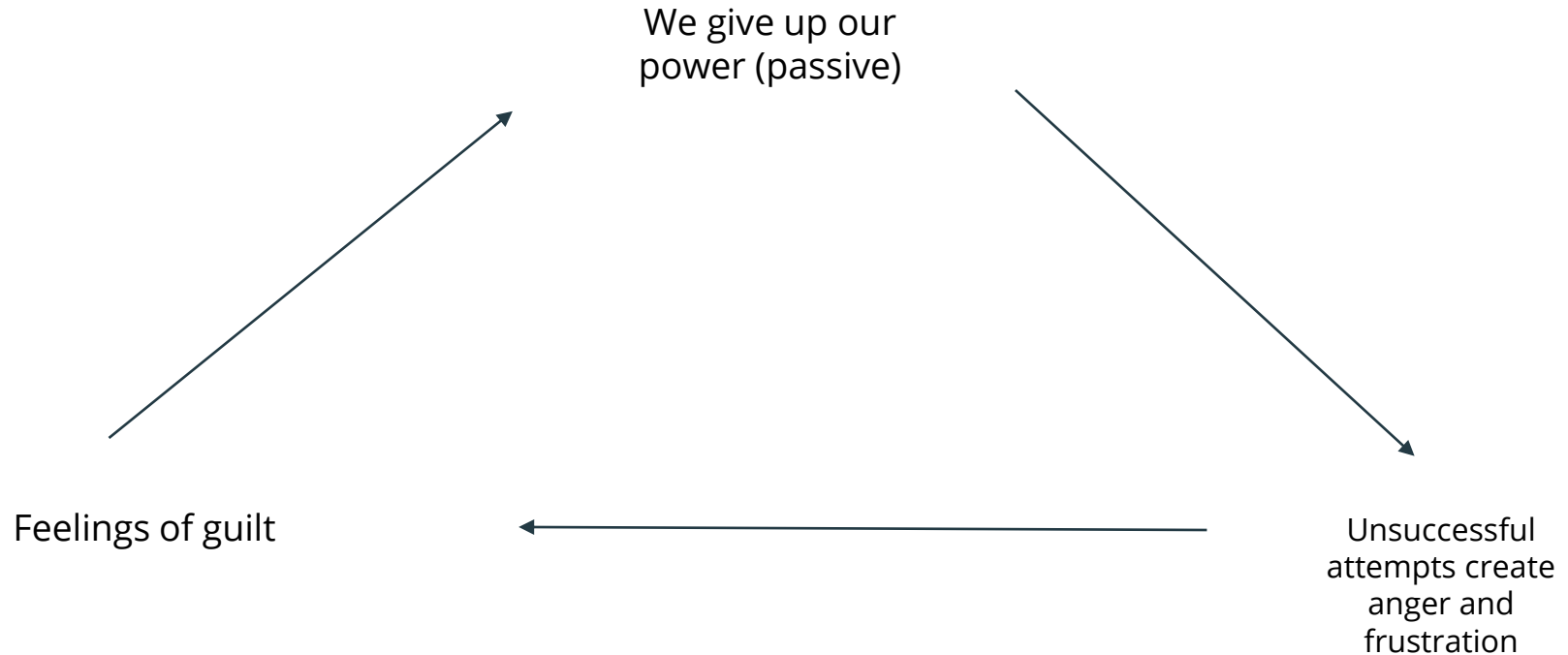


The Three Voices

- Passive Voice
 - The goal is to please others
 - Gives power to the child
 - “Let me hang up the phone first please”
 - “Will you give me a second please to clean this up”
 - “Try to be nice please, ok?”
- We give up power for children to make the right choice
- When children do not, we become upset and angry
- Feeling of powerlessness
- Guilt leads to being more passive



Passive Cycle



The Three Voices

- Aggressive Voice
 - Concerned with winning
 - “You” and “Me” language - “You always interrupt me!”
 - Focuses on the person, not the actual problem at hand
 - Adults - An argument
 - Children - Talking back
- Extreme Statements - “Always” or “Never”
- Generalizing all good or all bad - children internalize this
- Children feel attacked



The Three Voices

- Assertive Voice
 - Clear picture of what we want our children to do
 - “No doubt” in our tone and the command
- We focus on what we want
- We cannot set limits and take care of other people’s feelings at the same time
- Our voices do not raise, but the tone changes



CORE IDEA

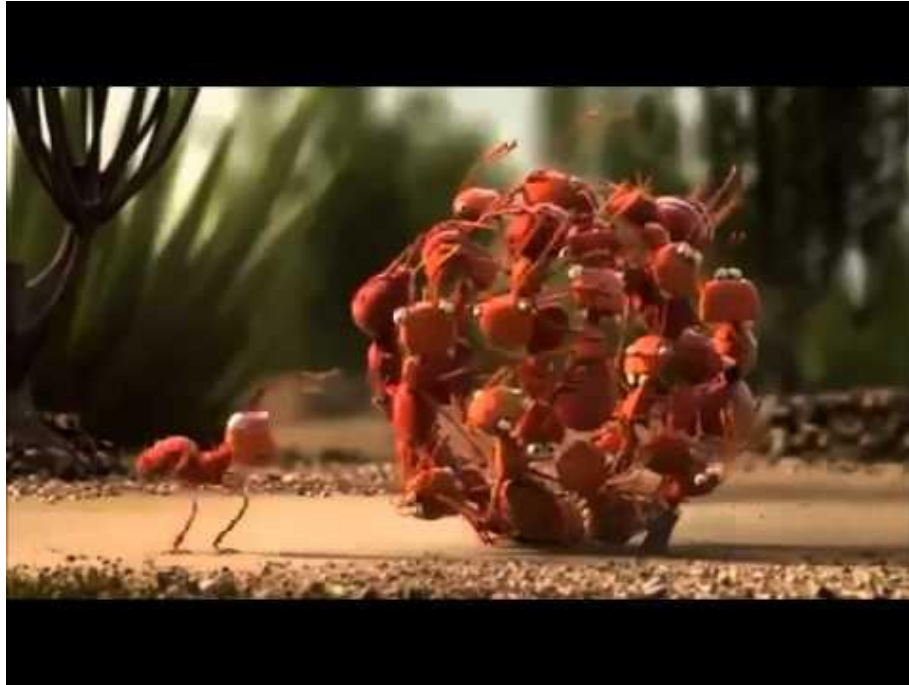
- **Being passive or coddling seek to avoid the difficult feelings rather than teaching.**
- **Being aggressive seeks to suppress or remove the difficult feelings rather than teaching.**
- **Regulating our triggers is the first step in teaching children to manage their emotions.**

Power of Unity

*We are all in this
together.*

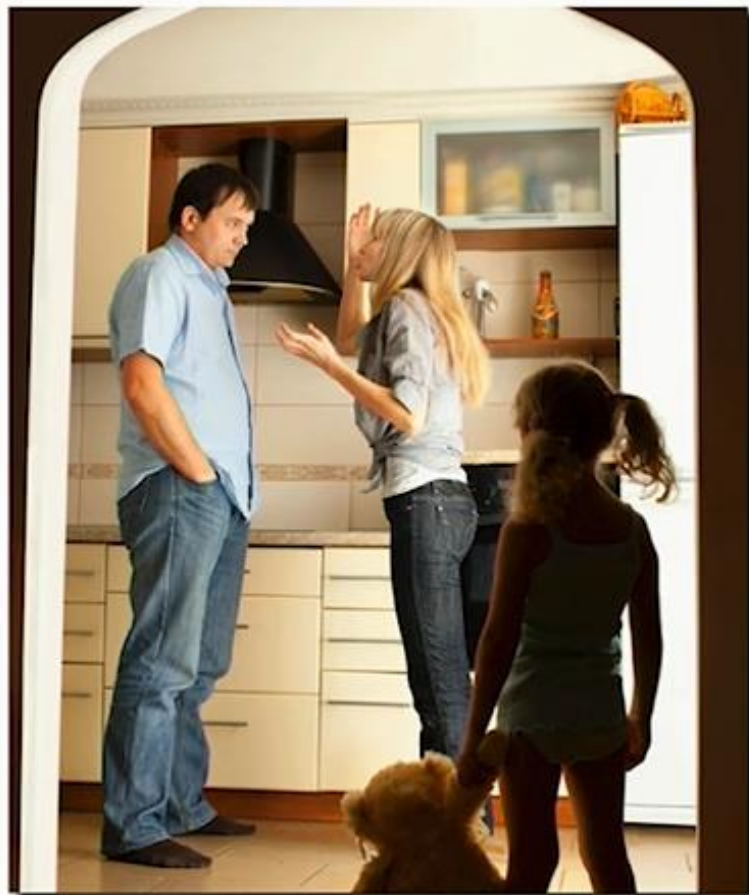


Power of Unity



The way parents treat each other is even more powerful for a child's development of self-regulation than the way the the parents treat the children.

Adult First—Child Second



Power of Unity

- Connection is essential for survival.
- It keeps us in an optimal brain state that facilitates learning and problem solving
- People have an innate desire to connect with others, form bonds, care, be empathetic and choose cooperation.
- In fact, this need is so great rejection can physically hurt.



Power of Unity

- The quality of our relationships impacts how we perceive the world.
- When children experience rejection, the pain system comes on and shuts down the higher centers of the brain.
- When shut down, children are unable to make healthy choices.
- Without the ability to self-regulate, they end up in an aggressive state where they may hurt themselves or others.
- ***Children must be connected before they can cooperate, learn and succeed.***



Example- The Still Face Experiment



Skill of Noticing

- Noticing helps to encourage children in a way that makes their accomplishment their own rather than making it about us. Noticing provides a play-by-play description of the action and sounds like this
- Encourage the following children with “you did it!” and a description of their accomplishment
- Acceptance shows unconditional love or love that makes no demands
- When we judge children, we tell them who we think they should be

Judging vs. Noticing

- “Good job, Erica!” **or**
 - “Erica, you put your toys in the bins and your clothes in the drawers. You’ve cleaned your room so you can find things when you want them!”
- “You are such a good boy.” **or**
 - “You showed Cody how to butter his bread without tearing it. That was helpful.”
- “That was a great slide!” **or**
 - “You did it! You came down the slide feet first and landed right in my arms.”

Power of Free Will - Who is in Charge of You?

- Reclaiming responsibility in our lives and avoiding:
 - "I have to"
 - "You're making me"
 - "I should"
- Shifting to:
 - "I'm going to"
 - "I feel"
- Avoiding responsibility is the root of this language
- True power comes from choice, not force
 - "In order to gain control we must be willing to give it up"
- A child's change starts with us



We tend to be the hardest on the kids who mirror the behaviors we don't like in ourselves.

The Power of Free Will - Who Controls Your Kids?

- Giving our power away to children sets them up to be pleasers or controllers, it also sets us up to blame
 - “You’re making me so angry”
- Children tend to experiment with this control
 - “I wonder what else I can make her do?”
- Help your children be in charge of the own emotions and behaviors
 - “Look at her face, she looks sad”
- When we control a child's internal free will, we replace it with external forcefulness
 - A child will rely on their outside environment for everything
 - Anger
 - Sadness
 - Love
 - Acceptance



Power of Free Will

- You can't make someone do something unless he or she is willing
- You are the only person you truly have control over
- Student have the ability to choose how they respond to others behaviors in the classroom
- Shift from:
 - How can I make my child do this?
to...
 - How can I help my child choose to behave a certain way?



Choices and the Brain



Children need assertive and directive commands



Two positive choices



Open ended questions



Skill of Choices

- Choices reinforce a child's free will and put them in charge of themselves
- The PLAN!
 - Breathe deeply and make a decision to focus on what you want the child to do
 - Tell the child "you have a choice!"
 - Clearly state the choices that that will achieve the goal
 - "You may _____ or you may _____."
 - Complete the process with helping them commit to one choice by asking, "What is your choice?"
 - Notice this choice



How you treat
yourself is how you
are inviting the
world to treat you.

Neuroplasticity

- The brain changes based on experience
- When we focus our attention on negative messaging, we strengthen these pathways and become more reactive and hurtful. We also put stress on our immune, endocrine and cardiovascular systems.
- When we focus our attention on the positive, we strengthen these pathways to become healthier, happier and more loving. We can present our best selves to others, including the children in our care.



