

Kids Talking Back During Discipline

Question: *Sometime when I discipline my five-year-old daughter she tells me that I am hurting her feelings, not being loving, or that in some way I am not disciplining her quite like she thinks is fair. I don't want to tell her she can't say those things, but they don't seem right either. Is it okay to ask her to stop?*

Response (from Kathleen): Good question, sister. I am assuming that your overriding fear is of establishing an environment of squelching healthy dialogue between your child and you if you do not let her express her feelings?

So, let's step back and look at the big picture. Sure, a mommy and her child should have all kinds of open dialogue and communication about all kinds of things AS LONG AS the dialogue does not undermine your position as her mommy, her authority. ANY dialogue that grays those lines of who is in authority and who is in submission (mommy in authority, child yielded to that authority☺) is not right and should not be allowed. It will bear bad fruit down the road as they get older.

Of course, we allow our children to express themselves and their feelings all the time, but always under the guidelines of the Word. Even the Bible gives boundaries on how, when, and where I, as a grown Christian woman, can and should express myself. For example, we know that I cannot just say anything I want when I am mad and frustrated. God still calls me to respond carefully, choose my words carefully, and stay in the Spirit. In other words, I still need to stay under God's authority and "go by God's rules", even if I don't agree with those rules or feel like following those rules. Is God overly concerned with squelching me and me not fully expressing myself? Obviously not. HE KNOWS WHAT IS GOOD FOR ME AND WHAT WILL BEAR A GOOD FRUIT IN MY LIFE. And that is me not playing by my own rules, based on my emotions at the moment.

In the same way, there are far bigger things at stake here than your child being squelched and not being able to express her emotions. (My guess is that she is "gifted" at communicating and that will not go away☺) The "bigger things" are for her to be under authority and to express herself respectfully to you, her mommy. ANY TIME she says something that is not respectful or not her place to make a "judgment call", then she is out of bounds. She is the little girl (yielded to what her mommy knows and thinks is best) and YOU ARE THE MOMMY! Don't relinquish your authority and your voice in her life all because of your fears. (By the way, those fears are ones that our culture has come up with and defined, right?)

In your examples, I would definitely say that those things she is saying when you are disciplining her are not appropriate and should be "squelched". A verse comes to mind here –

Proverbs 19:20 (NASU) "Listen to counsel and accept discipline, that you may be wise the rest of your days."

In her responses, she is not accepting her discipline, nor is she yielded to your authority. In our home, our children are not allowed to say anything at all like the things in your example. They are taught to accept their discipline, to cry softly, and to remain respectful to us. Sure, we know that getting disciplined is hard and not pleasant for them. We discipline them carefully and lovingly and, at times, we communicate to them that God has called us to do this as parents for their best. They ALL seem to accept this and receive it.

Of course the next question is: “Do things change as they get older?”. And yes, things do slightly change when (not “as”, but “when” ☺) they get older. Again here, we are not coming up with some arbitrary Nelson guidelines, but we are looking to the Word to teach our children how God wants them to communicate with us. Our older kids are taught to say, “May I please ask a question?” We often reply with, “Is the question respectful and carefully worded?” If they say “yes”, we probably would say, “Go ahead.” Then they might say something like, “Why are you doing things this way?” We would still feel the freedom to not answer that question (although we do at times), but we would definitely get into some nice healthy dialogue. As long as the kids are being respectful and yielded, these dialogues can be a great opportunity to teach them about God’s ways of doing things. But sometimes that dialogue can end with this verse too: “There is a way that seems right to a man (you, my son☺), but in the end it leads to death.”

Overall, we should focus on making sure that the relationship, and the boundaries of the relationship with our children, are healthy and biblically-based, and not fall into the cultural trap of thinking that “being able to express our feelings” is what is healthy for the child.

Consider some of the following biblical principles that can apply to this situation. Always remember that God’s ways will be the best for our child, not what we think is best for them.

Ephesians 4:29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

Proverbs 10:19 When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.

Colossians 3:20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.