Start Where Your Child Is

Recently I posted my top 10 tips for parenting success. Now I want to elaborate on the list in my next 10 postings. Parenting Tip #1 is this:

# Start Where Your Child Is

Ten year old Robbie just came in the back door after having ridden bikes through the neighborhood with his friend, Jack. Mom noticed that the door bounced a little, not quite a slam, as Robbie sat down at the kitchen table. He grabbed his IPad and found a video game.

“Hey, Sweetie,” mom cooed. “Everything all right?” Robbie’s thumbs rapidly moved over the keyboard.

“Huh?” he mumbled, while keying in on his gaming. “Uh, yeah…okay.” He then put his IPad down and left the kitchen, going into the family room, where his younger sister was playing with her Barbie set. “Don’t be such a baby,” he dug at her as he passed by and went upstairs.

Mom found Robbie in his bedroom, laying on his top bunk, hands intertwined on the pillow behind his head, staring at the mini-galaxy of stars stuck to his ceiling. She knocked on the open door and came into his room when he responded.

“Ummm, is somebody in a funk?” mom asked timidly.

“What do you want?” Jack muttered while still gazing at his stars.

“Excuse me?”

Robbie sighed, “I’m sorry.”

Mom settled down on his desk chair, as Robbie swung his legs over the railing of the top bunk.

“Okay, got a minute to help me out?” mom asked.

“Whatever.”

Mom ignored the disrespect and attitude, attributing it to Robbie’s mood. She then shared her list of observations she had mentally compiled since Robbie had come in from his bike ride with Jack, concluding, “So, It seems that your body is here but your mind is somewhere else. How am I doing so far?”

Robbie sighed, paused, and then launched into what was on his mind.

At any point during this exchange, mom could have laid out her assumptions, his attitude, and ultimately some version of “The Talk” about life and how her son should act. If she had, Robbie would have tuned her out after her first three words.

Instead, mom stayed with her son, gave him his space, allowed him to be who he was in the moment, and then asked for clarification. This is a great example of starting where your child is.

In such moments, your goal is not punishing, praising, or correcting your child. It’s relating to him where he is. He may or may not show an emotional fever. If he does, use active listening to help him lower his fever. He may just need to unpack his “stuff” with your giving him an attentive ear. Starting where your child is involves being in the moment with him, following his lead, and offering counsel only when and if he asks for it. This is the foundation of your healthy relationship with him.