 “Hammering” It At Home

 by: Lara Davis

This month, we add a hammer to our parenting/teaching tool boxes. The hammer reminds us to be assertive when dealing with children (and adults for that matter). The goal of assertiveness is communicating clearly and concisely what we want the child to do. If we focus on making the child behave, our voices take on a more aggressive tone. Aggressive messages use fear and dominance to “make” the child comply. On the other hand, our voices may become passive, thus avoiding conflict by trying to please the child or manipulate him in order to get compliance.

An assertive voice is one that is confident and intended to help the child be successful instead of making him behave. We actually increase the chances that a child will comply when we sound sure of ourselves, speak in a confident tone, and use gestures to help create mental pictures, all with the belief that our child CAN be successful. Consider the following example:

Parent: (Before speaking to the child, the parent walks over to the child and makes eye contact) “Billy.” It is time for bed. Pick up the toys and put them in the basket.”

Child: “NO!”

Parent: “I hear you. It’s tough to stop playing. But, it is time for bed. Pick up the toys and put them in the basket.” (Parents help the child form a mental image of picking up the toys…using visual cues and gesturing to show the child what he is to do.)

Child: “NO!”

Parent: “You may pick up the cars first or the trucks first. Which will you choose?” (Again, attention is focused on what we want the child to do.)

If the “NOs” continue, the parent breathes and, as calmly as possible, repeats the choices. As soon as the child moves to pick up the toys, we notice and offer encouragement. We could say, “Look at you. You are doing it!” (And, if the child still does not comply? Well, stay tuned for another helpful tool!)

Why choose a hammer for assertiveness? Here’s a quick guide to proper hammering:

* Focus on the nail, not the hammer (what we want the child to do). Direct contact is made when attention is focused on the nail (child).
* Avoid sideways and glancing blows (passivity). Using every ounce of energy in our bodies is exhausting and not necessary (aggression). That leads to wild swings and bent nails!
* The weight of the hammer head accompanied by a smooth swing gets the job done in a safe manner. ([www.artofmanliness.com/2009/09/29/how-to-use-a-hammer](http://www.artofmanliness.com/2009/09/29/how-to-use-a-hammer))

Remember:

* first put on your goggles (create a safe environment)
* plug in any power tools needed (connection)
* keep the level at hand (balance the brain)
* use the hammer confidently, focusing on the nail (what we want the child to do).

For more information on this skill of assertiveness, visit: [www.consciousdiscipline.com](http://www.consciousdiscipline.com).