



Michael Bradley, PhD What To Do When ...

Attendee Notes for Menlo School Workshop: Feb. 4, 2012

Michael Bradley, PhD, is a licensed clinical psychologist with a doctoral degree in psychology from Temple University. His award winning books have received ten national publishing awards. He is also a recipient of the prestigious William Penn Humanitarian Award, Commission on Human Relations. More information about Dr. Michael Bradley may be found at www.docmikebradley.com

Part 1: Dr. Bradley speaks broadly on questions submitted online

On what to do when your teen gets in trouble: Be the dispassionate cop, not the angry cop (See Commandment 1). You want teens to be mad at themselves for bad decisions/behavior, not at you (the cop). Their ability to learn from their mistakes is all about the delivery system – punishment vs. agreed-upon consequences. Punishment is hurting someone for being hurtful, a chain reaction which activates the animal center of the brain, resulting in feelings of humiliation, confrontation and fear. Agreed-upon consequences are simply the outcome of an action, respectful treatment which engages the learning center. Example: What if your teen gets a DUI? Without anger, simply roll back the driving privileges for 6 months. “This shows us you’re not ready. I know you’ll get your license back eventually.” Note: if you do blow it, and get angry, then APOLOGIZE. Teach teens by talking about your own failures – use this opportunity to build the relationship.

On how to communicate effectively:

No shouting.

Timing is critical:

- Bad times to talk – in the morning, right after school
- Best time to talk – late at night, midnight – their brains are active, they are so desperate for human interaction, they’ll settle for mom or dad
- OK to hit the pause button if you need to step back and re-think the mission. “I’ll get back to you later tonight.” Don’t try to parent if your child is under the influence. “I can smell the alcohol. We’ll talk tomorrow.”

Gender differences:

- Moms tend to talk too much, say the same thing over and over. Be careful not to do this! Best to shorten the interaction, especially with boys – talk the way guys talk to guys, no gazing into each other's eyes. 5-7 words in the morning is perfect for a 13 year old boy.
- Dads tend to say/do nothing. Dads should keep reaching out; dads can talk “sideways” without eye contact, use short sentences, lots of hugs

Content:

- Don't ask “How was your day?” (it was a million things, too many to process)
- Ask framing questions: “Tell me something good/bad that happened today.” High/Low.
- “Can I ask you another question?” Good trick. The idea is to connect the dots with consecutive questions. Start with the “dot” that he's at, and keep going, an effective way to get information, and teach. Example: “Can I ask you a question? Why do you want to go to _____?”
- Listen, and DON'T ARGUE WITH THEIR ANSWERS. They'll stop answering if you reject their answers. Even if in the end you have to say “I love you too much to let you go,” you will have conveyed “I've listened to you, I'm open to debate, I love you.”
- Think of it like an interview. “Why do you ...?” “What does it do for you?”

Best locations:

- At midnight in bed – bring in a hackysack so there's no need for eye contact
- Coffee shop, cars
- Sometimes changing venues will bring out different responses (if you always fight in the kitchen, don't try to talk there ...)

Part 2: Questions from the Audience

1. *What about peer pressure?*

Most peer pressure is POSITIVE. Most kids pressure other kids to be successful. It's a myth that kids force drugs on each other. But ... they may want to be like that person who does it. Don't focus on friends as the problem; kids naturally segregate into groups of similarly minded kids. FOCUS ON YOUR KID, NOT THEIR FRIENDS. “What does this do for you?”

2. *What about the “village” – how does it look today?*

A “village” can be immensely powerful for teenagers, as they often reject parent traditions and need to find other healthy role models. Fences in a neighborhood limit the interaction. We need to be intentional about building a village and creating logistics that make it happen – camps, activities, anything other than sitting in their rooms playing videogames.

3. What about gray areas – for example, riding in cars with kids without their “year”?

Have the conversation, affirm their opinions. “I understand how great it is.” Whatever you end up deciding as parents, make sure that they feel heard.

4. If our household has strict rules, won’t kids just go to other houses?

(This question related to Dr. Bradley’s anecdotes in his keynote about how he would not forbid his son and his friends from listening to offensive lyrics, but would sit down and listen with them, and talk to them about studies which show how media affects teen behavior.)

Dr. Bradley’s secret to us: KIDS ARE LOOKING FOR WAYS TO GET OUT OF THE MADNESS. They want to come out the other side reasonably intact. Although his son didn’t really like these “lectures”, his friends didn’t mind; they were curious. It’s important to start at an early age, “inoculate” our kids about sex, drugs, and violence, so that they internalize “this stuff could hurt me – no thanks”. Don’t let culture get the last word. KEEP HAVING THOSE UNCOMFORTABLE CONVERSATIONS about sex, drugs, violence.

5. Best way to monitor technology?

OPENLY SPYING is a must. NOT secretly spying. “I will be checking … I’m sorry, it’s an invasion of your privacy, I hate doing it too, but I need to make sure you’re safe. It’s the price of having this stuff.” Dr. Bradley gave an anecdote about his own daughter’s experience on Facebook – girls can be particularly vicious.

6. What about entitlement?

Entitlement is an orange level problem. Kids need to get out of “Disneyworld” and into the real world. Doing real world service is a great idea. Tell kids “I think it’s a bad idea to rely on me. I want you to be able to take care of yourself.”

What about messy rooms?

Yellow level. Be sure to watch their eyes for their level of pain – if you put a lot of energy into forcing this, there may be diminishing returns with “too high casualties.” Save it for more urgent battles.

7. What do I say when my kid asks “Did you ever do drugs?”

NEVER LIE, although if they’re younger, you can punt and say “Let’s talk about this when you’re 16.” Teens are looking for information when they ask you this. When the window to their brain is open, take advantage. Go get coffee, use your stories, talk about people you know who didn’t make it. TELL THE TRUTH – you’ll lose your credibility if you lie.

8. Where is the research on how media affects teen behavior, particularly with respect to violence and videogames? Look on GOOGLE SCHOLAR

(scholar.google.com) to find these studies (American Medical Association), share with your kids and have the conversation.