

Positive+Parent™ Newsletter

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ARE YOUR RESPONSES JUST RIGHT?

“Personal relationships are the fertile soil from which all advancement, all success, all achievement in real life grows.” - Ben Stein

I recently read about some research on what makes good marriages. Of course, there is a ton of research about why marriages go bad. Dr Shelly Gable looks at what goes right in a good marriage.

One of the important factors, not surprisingly, is how one spouse responds to the other's news. You might think it is all about showing empathy when your spouse relates bad news. For example, how you respond when your husband comes home and tells you he has been laid off of work. But Dr Gable actually looks at how we respond to good news.

There are four possible responses. As an example from my own life, I was recently asked to create a new course at the university where I teach. When I told my wife this news, one way she could have responded was by being both positive and enthusiastic - “Wow, great, I'm so proud of you.” Another possible way was positive and subdued - “Good news.” A third possibility would have been enthusiastically negative - “Oh my, that will be a lot of work, and what if they don't accept your proposal after you do the work. And that may mean another evening class.” The final possibility was passive and negative - “Oh, okay, by the way, the market was out of your favorite kind of cereal.”

It is pretty obvious which is the best way to respond. (And, yes, my wife was very positive and very enthusiastic and immediately began to tell her family and our friends. I think she was more positive and enthusiastic than I was!)

To give you another example from my life, seven or

eight years ago when I decided to run a marathon, I told my father. His response was, “Don't hurt yourself. You know running a marathon can be bad for your ankles and knees” or something to that effect. Now I know that my father said this only out of love and concern for me, I have no doubt about that. But that love and concern did not make me feel very good at the moment.

The reason the first response is so powerful is because of something psychologists call “capitalizing”. You take the pleasure of the present moment and capitalize on it and spiral the positive emotions upward. And this is a key to strong relationships.

Some of us are very good at responding actively and enthusiastically. And we reap the rewards in wonderful relationships with our spouses and kids.

Some of us have trouble responding enthusiastically when we are distracted. So if we are at the game when our

child's team wins the game, we will pick them up and jump up and down. But what if they tell us when we are in the middle of watching a football game? Or reading our email? (The email is my downfall!)

And sometimes, out of love and concern, we respond negatively, like my Dad did. I am not saying we shouldn't be concerned. But perhaps we should bring it up later on. First, let's give an enthusiastic response and then brainstorm how to overcome any problems.

So think a little bit about how you respond when your children (or spouse) come home with good news. And think about if there is room for improvement. If you keep improving, you will create a better relationship with your kids!



You can reach me by email at DrShaya@PositiveParentPlus.com I love to hear reader comments.

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