

Reflecting Versus Reacting

Reflecting Versus Reacting

* Imagine with me for a moment that you have just arrived home from a party.

“Honey, I’m so hungry, do we have anything good to eat?” you ask your spouse.

“Hungry!” Spouse exclaims, “How could you possibly be hungry; you ate tons of food at the party!”

* Or, how about this scenario:

“Sweetheart,” you begin as you turn towards your spouse to express yourself, “I’m really very hot. Would you lower the thermostat please?”

“Hot!” Spouse practically shouts, “I’ll tell you what hot is- go outside in the sun, then you’ll feel hot! When you come back inside, you’ll realize that it’s very comfortable in here.”

Well, how did you feel about that? Did you feel understood? Did you feel that your feelings had been taken into account in a meaningful way? Or, were you left wondering whether your emotions were actually real? Perhaps you were not actually hungry? Could it be that the heat was simply a figment of your imagination? Or, did you wonder whether your spouse could begin to understand you after all?

Imagine traveling in the mini-van with your daughter.

“I’m hungry!” she whines during a long stretch of the highway.

“You are not hungry, darling,” You respond to your daughter, “you just ate dinner.”

Daughter has two choices right now:

- 1) Choice #1: Believe Parent; if my parent says that I’m not hungry, then that must be the fact. The rumbling in my belly must be my imagination. Unconsciously, the thought process will travel even further: My feelings may not be real. I’ve got to check with my parents to see if my feelings are truly accurate. I am not capable of trusting my own intuition and emotions.
- 2) Choice #2: Not believe Parent; if my parent says that I’m not hungry, that means he/she does not know what he is talking about! My own feelings will guide me to knowledge of the truth. Unconsciously, the thought process will travel down a

road that looks like this: My parent does not understand me at all. He/she has no idea who I am or what I am feeling.

I recall speaking with two different friends recently on a day that I was suffering from stomach problems.

- ⇒ Friend A said to me, “Why don’t you try this pill or that pill?”
- ⇒ Friend B empathized with, “Oh, Ellen, it’s so hard to get anything done when your stomach is out of sorts... it’s as though the whole you is out of sorts, but your mind is working fine and you want to do things, you just feel like you’re weighed down.”

Obviously, Friend A meant well. However, it was Friend B who reflected my feelings that made me feel comforted.

Like learning a new language, switching gears from reacting to your children’s expressions to the new method of reflecting their inner feelings, will take a bit of time. In the beginning, you may feel awkward with this manner of conversation, yet over time, it will become a natural and habitual way of response.

When a child hears his emotions reflected back to him, he is able to accept, trust, and respect his own feelings. That is the essence of confidence. When a child has the ability to base ideas and decisions upon his thoughts and feelings, he is self-aware and possesses a healthy level of self-esteem.



HERE IS AN EXAMPLE OF REACTIONARY AS WELL AS REFLECTIVE PARENTAL BEHAVIOR:

- ❖ Scene I- Reacting: Susie came home from school with a watercolor painting. “Wow, this is beautiful,” Mom gushed, “really spectacular; you’re a wonderful artist.”
 - A quick peak into Susie’s mind will yield this train of thought: “Am I really an artist? What about all those times that my paintings didn’t come out so nice? How do I know that I can keep on painting so well? What will Mom say if my next painting is not this pretty?”
- ❖ Scene II- Reflecting: Susie came home from school with a watercolor painting. “I like the colors you chose,” Mom said. “The bright red and green make me feel like getting a juicy fruit for a snack right now.”
 - A quick peak into Susie’s mind will yield the following: “Wow, Mom really thinks my fruits look real, she even got hungry looking at my painting. I can actually paint an object and make it look appealing. Next time I’m going to try painting cookies. Or bread with jam. Or perhaps flowers.”