

Dealing with Parenting Challenges - "Hostage Negotiation"

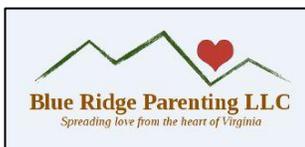
by Decca Knight

Every weekend when I go to Walmart, I get to experience a number of different parenting case-studies. The screaming four-year-old a few rows over who **MUST** have the *Thomas the Train Lego* set, the lovely young lady who is whining to her mother about the *Nintendo DS* game, and the kicking and screaming toddler who is having a fit on the floor. We have all been there, haven't we? Our face turns bright red, our blood pressure rises, and our palms start to sweat! We swear that every adult in the store is thinking we are the worst parent ever. Isn't it amazing that such a little person can hold us hostage in a situation like this? How can the power differential be so great?

One of the ways that we, as parents, can prevent such episodes is by setting expectations for our child before we enter the store. Often we say to our child, "don't touch anything." This is not realistic for most children. Instead, tell them what things they can gently touch and what things they cannot touch. This gives them a bigger sense of freedom and should cut down on the control battles. Also, inform your child if you are going to buy something for him or her, or something for yourself. If I am shopping for myself, and my son asks for something, I ask him if he has enough money from his allowance. Usually he does not have enough money, and the conversation is over. I rarely tell my son that he cannot have something. Why? Because I know that this might cause him to "lose it." Instead I let the money be the "bad guy."

If you have properly informed your child of your expectations, the amount of groveling should diminish. But, how do you handle it if your child still has a major meltdown? Some parents handle it by saying, "If you behave, I will get you a treat." Though this may work in the short-term, you may be setting yourself up for failure in the future. Your intelligent offspring will soon realize that if they misbehave, and then "turn their behavior around," they get a treat. Oh, what a fun game! Instead of "flaming the fire," calmly remove the child from the situation. This interchange may sound like, "Gosh dear, you are having a rough time, let's take a break out in the car." You then escort your little darling out to the parking lot. At this point you may decide to leave the store or allow the child some cool-off time in the car before going back in. Now, I know what you are thinking, "I can't leave all my groceries, clothes, etc., in the basket." Yes you can! You will only have to do this a few times, and your child will get the hint.

Isn't it amazing how, even young kids, can sense when they have their parents between a "rock and a hard place." They hope that, in public, you will be more lenient to avoid embarrassment. My motto as a parent, however, is that I am willing to endure a lot of embarrassment if in the process I am teaching my child a good lesson. So what if I look a bit crazy leaving a full cart in the row at Walmart! At least my son knows that he will never be holding me hostage!



Decca Knight owns Blue Ridge Parenting LLC and teaches early childhood parenting classes sponsored by Smart Beginnings Greater Roanoke, including "Becoming a Love & Logic Parent®" The next class will meet on Tuesday evenings, May 1st-May 29th at Raleigh Court CDC for more information visit www.blueridgeparenting.com or call Smart Beginnings at #540-777-4211