

Guiding Questions and Enforceable Statements

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Previously, I have written several past blogs about effective ways of communicating with our children. Using an **enforceable statement** is describing what I as the parent will or can do such as, "I listen to people who talk to me in a calm and respectful manner" or "I drive kids to soccer practice/the mall/their friends' house who have finished their chores." It is about replacing threats and warnings with simple action and turning your words into gold. You can read more about Enforceable Statements here: www.coachmyrna.org/blog/enforceable-statements

Another tool that I highly recommend is learning to use **guiding questions** instead of trying to tell your child what to do. This approach is effective because it empowers the child or youth to begin to solve their own problems, it creates cooperation instead of resistance, it develops self-efficacy and ownership, and it shares control with the child. More about learning to share control here:

www.coachmyrna.org/blog/sharing-control-through-choices and
www.coachmyrna.org/blog/gifts-we-can-give-our-children-sharing-control

I'd like to give you a few examples of how to use **guiding questions**. Mom and four-year-old Alex getting are ready to leave the home for school and work. Below is their conversation through which Mom was able to help Alex think through his choices and arrive at the best one without getting upset or having Mom make it for him.

Mom: "Alex, honey. You still have your slippers on, and we must go to school. The car leaves in 5 minutes."

Alex: "I like my Mickey Mouse slippers, Mama. I want to wear them to school."

Mom: "I know you like them, Sweetie." "How do you think your slippers will work in the classroom?"

Alex: "Great"

Mom: "How do you think they'll work when you go outside for recess?"

Alex: "Oh" (He thinks about this for a bit. His mom is quiet and doesn't say a word, giving Alex time to think.) "I gotta change into my tennis shoes, Mama. But can I pack my slippers in my backpack?"

Mom: "Sure, honey. Car leaves in four minutes."

Another scenario could go like this: Fifteen-year-old Holly once again left the kitchen a mess after several conversations about cleaning up after herself. Holly had agreed to do this each morning before going to school.

Mom: "You didn't clean the kitchen before school this morning."

Holly: "I couldn't help it. I started cleaning, but I didn't have time to finish before we had to leave for school."

Mom: "What time did you get up this morning?"

Holly: "Seven."

Mom: "Who made you get up at that time?"

Holly: "Nobody."

Mom: "So you chose to get up at seven, is that right?"

Holly: "Yes."

Mom: "Then you could have chosen to get up earlier—at 6:30 am, for example—and cleaned the kitchen."

Holly: "But I was up late last night?"

Mom: "And whose choice was that?"

Holly: "Okay, I get the point."

It is important to note that both Alex and Holly could listen to their moms because they had a foundation of love and the parents weren't angry or upset. Children need to be loved and taught to understand choices and responsibility and guiding questions are a great tool to support this process.

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