

*By Marilyn Sharpe*

**The Eighth Commandment**

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

***What does this mean?***

We are to fear and love God, so that we do not tell lies about our neighbors, betray or slander them, or destroy their reputations. Instead we are to come to their defense, speak well of them, and interpret everything they do in the best possible light.     Luther's *Small Catechism*

It's been a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day. Your child feels like they can't do anything right. No one likes them. Everyone is unfair. No one has cut them any slack. Your child is deflated and defeated. So, what are you as the parent to do for this your youngest, most beloved neighbor? What does it mean "to come to [your child's] defense, speak well of them, and interpret everything they do in the best possible light?"

**Unjustly accused.** Of course, you will stand up for your child when someone accuses them of something they didn't do. That needs to extend to authority figures, like teachers, neighbors, family members, and other adults. Your child needs to know that you will get their back, when they are being wronged. Justice needs to begin in the home. (Note: this does not mean that you will lie or cover for them or insulate them from the consequences of misbehavior. Help them learn to accept responsibility and make it right when they have done wrong.)

**Labeling the child.** We've all heard it: "My, isn't she spoiled!" "He is awfully shy, isn't he?" "Your daughter is really aggressive!" "Boy, he's over-sensitive!" "What a brat!" If the adult had just punched you in the stomach, it couldn't have hurt you ... or your child more. What to do now?

**Reframe it.** "Shy," "aggressive," "oversensitive?" How about this as a response ... and please do it in earshot of your child! "Devon is very observant and thoughtful. Before he jumps into something new, he watches, thinks about it, then enters. We are proud to have such a thoughtful son." "Ella knows how to stand up for herself ... and for others. She is assertive, not aggressive. We are very proud of her leadership and clear sense of justice." "Dan is a caring, empathetic, attuned little boy. His sensitivity is a positive quality; it is just right." What a difference it makes for your child to hear their traits as strengths, rather than character flaws.

**Catch your child doing things right and well.** Use twice as much energy catching your child doing something right, than something wrong. Name it. Affirm it. Tell the child that this is behavior worthy of them! Remember, what gets attention, gets repeated.

**Separate behavior from personhood.** If your child has misbehaved, let them know that they can change that behavior, which is not worthy of the person they are, and you will help them. Remind them of a time they handled the situation right or predict that very soon they will be able to do so. This is a child of God who lives with you. Affirm this identity and possibility in all you do as a parent. My father's favorite verse in scripture was one he lived by:

He has told you, O mortal, what is good;  
and what does the Lord require of you  
but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God.     *Micah 6:8*

He did justice, was kind, and walked humbly with God. What a difference that made to me as a child ... and how it shaped me as a parent and grandparent, teacher and friend.

What a role model! I was blessed. Now, it's my turn to pass it on. Won't you join me, defending your children, speaking well of them, and interpreting everything they do in the best possible light?

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

1. Name your child's qualities and actions in "the kindest way."
2. Don't let others negatively label your child. Speak up for your child. Reframe the label.
3. Separate behavior from personhood. Tell her you know she can change her behavior ... and you'll help.
4. "Catch" your child being just the person you want him to be. Name the behavior you like.
5. Give each person in your family an Affirmation Dinner. During the meal, have each person present name a quality they admire in the person being honored. Write them down and frame the list or put it on the fridge.