

The Boomerang Effect

*From the Confident Girls and Guys
"Simple and Sensible" series for Parents.*

As a kid, when you did something that you knew was wrong, do you remember muttering the words, "I'm really gonna get it when I get home?"

When I present a character building workshop to elementary schools, I'm always amazed to see that nearly every single student completely understands how the 'Boomerang Effect' works. I just can't figure out why so many of their parents don't understand that their kids need to have it implemented. The boomerang effect is a very simple lesson that teaches kids to expect a negative reaction from a negative action and it also demonstrates how positive action will bring positive reaction.

One of the ways I present this lesson is by pretending I'm a 12 year old coming home after a bad day at school. Once inside the door, I slam it hard, scream that everyone needs to leave me alone because I've had a bad day, throw my books to the floor and then stomp to my room and slam the door one more time.

While the students are still giggling, I ask them if they think their mom's reaction would be to say tenderly, "Oh honey, I love it when you scream at me, throw your things and slam doors. It makes me want to do something really special for you."

My young audience roars with laughter.

The demonstration continues to include negative action with kids at school, teachers and siblings. The kids get it....they understand the simple lesson because it just plain makes sense. The problem is that this lesson is not always understood or enforced by the adults in their lives. When we continually reward negative behaviour with a positive reaction, we are, in effect, asking our kids to repeat the negative action again and again.

When I present workshops to parents, I am often deluged with questions from parents who want to know why their child is not behaving.

I suggest that they do an honest review using the following 6 point depiction:

1. Kid behaves badly

2. Parent rewards or ignores behaviour
3. Kid repeats behaviour again because it paid off
4. Parent rewards or ignores again
5. Kid repeats it again expecting the same result
6. Very frustrated parent wonders what's gone wrong?

If you see a familiar pattern in the points above, perhaps your child needs you to explain and demonstrate the Boomerang Effect...both sides of it. Most kids are telling me that they absolutely understand and even expect that when they act in a negative manner, they can anticipate a similar reaction. On the affirmative side, they also learn the awesome result of how their positive actions bring positive reactions.