

The Power of Do's and Dont's



Swami Ram Tirth recalls a significant incident in one of his talks.

He visited a family and there was a little child at the gate.
He asked the child: What is your name?
The child did not get the question.
Swamiji asked therefore: How does your mummy call you?
"My mummy calls me "DON'T" the child promptly replied!
Probably most of the children will give this answer.

Our children tend to get a lot of don'ts from us.
Don't do this; don't do that that way, we keep saying.
In fact, we wax eloquent.
There is energy in what we say and the way we say it.
We do so because we mean well, very well, when we give them.
We do this both at home and at the school.

Some researchers have cared to ask: Does it serve the sought-after purpose?



The reply is disappointing, to say the least. Negative or don't-suggestions do NOT work.
They do not produce the sought after effect. This is sad in itself.
Sadder still is the fact that they produce the opposite effect!
They prove to be an invitation to do just the opposite.
The children tend to react to the harsh feeling rather than respond to the helpful fact.

From Dr. Atthreya's Desk



When we say 'don't do this', they tell themselves: Do, do this!

This they call the 'power' of negative suggestion.

Negative suggestions produce negative outcomes, the opposite of what was intended.

This phenomenon is therefore a caution for all of us both parents and teachers.

We have to get out of the habit of don't suggestions.

We should stop telling: Don't do this. Don't do that.

Instead, we should get into the habit of giving do-suggestions.

We should tell the children: Do this. Do that. Both are habits and therefore both call for conscious and sufficient attention.

A first step is awareness.

We can become alert to the fact of how often we give don't-do suggestions to children.

We can do this for a week or so.

We can objectively look at the outcomes of our negative harangues.

We can exchange notes with our fellow-teachers and neighbour-parents.

Once we convince ourselves of the research finding Namely, negatives or don'ts make people do more of the disapproved items.

We will find it easy to switch over to the new and helpful habit of positive suggestions.

After a few days, we can again exchange notes with fellow teachers.

This practice will help us develop conviction in the research finding.

And we do need conviction to switch over to the positive suggestion habit.

When we do this for a while, we will also have one more finding.

Even our positive suggestions are vague like Be a good student, Be a good child.

They are not in the nature of what exactly to do, how exactly to do.

Suggestions work better when they are specific and concrete.

To check whether they are indeed specific and concrete, we can arrange role play sessions.

We can effect course corrections and make sure we use language that can be translated into action, we would like to hear from you after some time, AFTER you have put it to work.

Your report will be more convincing.

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N. H. Atthreya

Think Again!

"Thought is subversive and revolutionary, destructive and terrible. Thought is merciless to privilege, established institutions, and comfortable habit. Thought is great and swift and free."

"To be without some of the things you want is an indispensable part of happiness."

"There is much pleasure to be gained from useless knowledge."

--Bertrand Russell

"Debate is masculine, conversation is feminine."

--Amos Bronson Alcott