

## Raising Successful Children...

# The Little Boy in the Bathroom

by Susan Collins



*"If you tell your children what you don't want, you'll get what you don't want. But if you tell your children what you do want, you'll get what you do want instead."*

When I was teaching success skills at Florida Power & Light, a participant asked about a problem he and his wife were having with their six-year-old. "He just doesn't learn. He does the same dumb things over and over. His teacher even thinks he might be learning disabled." I asked him for an example.

"Well, every night when he showers, he leaves the towels sopping wet in the middle of the floor. He leaves the shower curtain hanging outside the tub so water pours out all over the floor. Two months ago, the ceiling below the bath collapsed. It cost us thousands of dollars to fix. And he leaves the soap floating in a thick, slimy goo my wife hates cleaning up."

"So what do you and your wife do?"

"Pretty much the same thing every night. First we get mad. We just can't believe he's that stupid. And, I'm embarrassed to say it, but usually I tell him he's the dumbest kid I've ever known. He must be retarded. And, after I shout, 'I've told you a thousand times not to leave wet towels on the floor!' he cries and we send him to bed."

"I have good news for you and bad news for you," I said. "The good news is, based on what you've said, I certainly don't think your son is retarded. The bad news is . . . you and your wife are responsible for his problem. Your son has been doing exactly what you told him to do . . . except for the not."

"Follow along with me: Don't think about a hot fudge sundae, with two scoops of your favorite ice cream heaped high on a dish still warm from the dishwasher . . . Don't think about the ladle full of thick, hot fudge drizzled over the top . . . or the way the ice cream is beginning to melt around the edges . . . or the mound of whipped cream and walnuts in maple syrup . . . or that cherry on the top with the long red stem still attached.

"You didn't think about it, did you? Of course you did. Don't think about is the same thing as think about to the brain.

"When you talk to your child, instead of saying 'don't be late,' you need to say, 'be on time.' Instead of saying 'don't drop that glass,' you need to say 'hold it tightly.' Instead of saying 'don't worry,' you need to say 'relax, everything's okay.'"

As a group, we brainstormed steps he could take. The next morning we were all eager to hear how he had done.

*It was amazing! I told my son I was taking a Success and Leadership course at work, and I had discovered that I was the one creating the problem in the bathroom. I said I was sorry and – if he'd give me another chance – I was sure we'd be successful. A bit unsure, he nodded okay.*

"Watch me son," and I laid a towel on the floor and folded it neatly down the middle. Then I picked it up and carried it over to the towel bar, pulling it down carefully and straightening the edges. "Can you do that son?"

This time, he nodded a more definite

the curtain in, shouting, "Look out, Dad! You'll get water on the floor!"

"You really are smart. How about the soap? If I promise to take you out to get an ice cream cone of your choice, do you think you could make that soap last for a week?"

And tears streamed down that father's face.

Remember, if you tell your children what you don't want, you'll get what you don't want. But if you tell your children what you do want, you'll get what you do want instead. ☺



yes and laid down the towel, folding it neatly in half, carrying it over to the towel bar, pulling it down carefully and straightening the edges. "Wow, that's terrific! You're a very quick learner."

Next I showed him the way a shower curtain works. "When you turn the water on and the curtain is in the tub, the water runs straight down it to the drain. But if you leave the curtain out . . ." At that moment, he rushed over and pushed

"And if I make it last for two weeks, would you get me two?"

"Son, you're not just smart, you're one heck of a negotiator. Two cones it is, provided you still get clean!" Then my son began to cry, and I asked him what was wrong.

"Dad, you always told me I was a very stupid boy. I could never do anything right. I never thought you loved me, Dad. Now I know you do."

Excerpted with permission from *Our Children Are Watching: 10 Skills for Leading the Next Generation to Success* by Susan Collins. Ms. Collins spent 15 years "shadowing" corporate heads, outstanding educators, coaches, inventors and artists, to discover the common success skills they were using so she could share them with others. For information on her books, tapes and seminars, call The Technology of Success, 305-892-2702.