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They only do it because I tell them NOT to!
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We think in pictures. Not in words. Not in concepts, in pictures. And, when someone, like our parents, teachers, or coaches give us instructions, we picture what they are asking us to do.

Here's an example. Think about summer. What color is summer? Can you imagine out walking, seeing the bright sunlight reflect off the green, green leaves of the trees? Do you see the picture? We think in pictures.

Let's go one step further. "Don't think about skiing." I said, "Don't think about skiing." What are you thinking about? Skiing. Why? Because I said, "Don't"? That's what all the parents say, "They only do things because I tell them not to!"

In the sentence "Don't think about skiing," what can you make a picture of? Skiing. So you do. All the information we take in goes directly to our safety brain (amygdala). The safety brain thinks in pictures. We see skiing.

How long did it take for you to think, "Oh, she said 'don't'?" It probably took a split second.

The word "Don't" does not have a picture. It can't be processed by the safety brain. So, it has to be sent over to the thinking brain to be processed.

The split second it took for you to think, "Oh, she said 'don't'," is the time it takes for the safety brain to send something over to our thinking brain (neocortex) to be processed.

When we tell someone, "Don't do something," we are criticizing them. We are implying that the way they did it is wrong.

I tell my kids, "Don't leave your shoes at the front door." Where are their shoes every single time! My next comment is, "How many times do I have to tell you not to leave your shoes at the door?" What picture do they get from that statement?

Shoes at the front door. That's what the safety brain sees. They hear the implied criticism, "You did it wrong, again." That makes this conversation unsafe. Slam goes that gateway in their brain, shutting off all access to the thinking brain.

The word "Don't" can't get to the thinking brain to be processed, because the safety brain has taken over. So, where does the "Don't" go? It's gone. And the picture the kids have is, "Leave your shoes at the front door." And they are so good at following instructions, they leave them there every single time. How many times will I have to tell them? A million times or until they leave home, whichever comes first.

I've been giving them the wrong picture with which to follow through. And the picture is all they have.

Listen to yourself. How many times do you say "Don't" to the kids? It leads to a tremendous amount of frustration. We keep expecting them to change their behavior and cooperate more fully, never realizing we are creating the problem in the way we give instructions.

Don't you dare turn on that TV until you've walked the dog.
Don't bring home poor marks like this again!
Don't leave the bathroom messy.
Don't go to bed without brushing your teeth.
Don't hit your sister.
Don't come to class without your books.
Don't make such a mess.
Don't read all night.
Don't watch TV.
Don't stay out past 11:00 p.m.
Don't ask for more allowance.
Don't ask me to drive you.
Don't eat so fast.
Don't talk with your mouth full.

Take the don't off each one of these statements, and I hear parents around the world groan, as they realize one little word has created huge problems with their kids.

The easy solution is to talk in positives. Tell the kids what you do want, not what you don't.

We have been trained from birth to focus on the negative. When is the first time you remember saying "No" to your baby? Baby was probably three or four days old. "No, don't cry!" We've practiced so often, that we have perfected being negative!

It's always the right time to change. And every little bit of progress is worthwhile. Tell them:

Walk the dog, then watch TV.
Homework first.
Bring your books with you to class.
Keep your hands to yourself.
Lights off at 9:30 p.m.

And when they ask you for something, you always want to be able to say, "Yes."

A child who comes into the kitchen, five minutes before dinner, is told "No, you can't have a cookie. We're eating in five minutes." And we're faced with a temper tantrum. Instead, respond, "Yes you can have a cookie, right after dinner."

Answer "Yes" to every request. It's the picture that follows that will be the challenge.

Yes, you can stop shovelling the walk, July 8.

Yes, I will buy you a car. With your inheritance, after I die.

Yes, you can stay up all night, when you're 23!

Delete "Don't" from your vocabulary, and watch how well your kids start responding to instructions.

Calgary author Jeanette Kasper is an acclaimed professional speaker who's Canadian BEST SELLER, Anger is NOT an Emotion, is revolutionizing how we deal with others. This unique perspective on human behavior gives us an understanding of how people relate to each other that leads naturally to using the over 300 solutions Mrs. Kasper gives in her book.

As a best-selling author, international professional speaker, and syndicated columnist, Jeanette is always willing to answer your questions, give interviews, and do a training session with your company, association, or parenting group. Jeanette concentrates on helping others create harmonious relationships at work, home, and play.