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Program helps parents to connect

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By **CAITLIN SNYDER**
Correspondent

If there is one question that Sharon Silverstein is asked by parents time and time again, it is, "How do we get our children to listen?" A resident of Hillsborough, Silverstein is the founder of Living At Peace, a company she described as being devoted to "building mutual respect and resolving conflict" in families. And while the answer to the question above may vary from one child to another, parents can gain some valuable tips from Living At Peace's principle program, "Redirecting Children's Behavior."

"We teach parents to diagnose misbehavior in children. All misbehavior is miscommunication," said Silverstein. "We teach parents how to apply the correct remedy so that the misbehavior will show up less often and eventually disappear," she said.

One subject Silverstein commonly addresses with parents is the issue of power-struggles.

"In the midst of a power-struggle with a child, I tell the parent to take a pause and

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ask an important question: "What is the value that I want to teach my child?" said Silverstein. To teach responsibility, Silverstein suggests, offer the child two courses of action, each of which comes with a consequence.

"By giving a power-struggle child a choice, they feel that they have power, and you fulfill that need," said Silverstein.

She recalled an incident in which a mother had contacted her, complaining that her 5 year-old son would not stop hitting her. Silverstein advised the mother to tell the child, "Wow, you just seem really angry right now." Said Silverstein: "The kid's anger level went from 10 to two. He felt that someone else understood what he was feeling."

Parents aren't the only ones who can learn from the programs offered by Living At Peace; children, too, benefit from classes directed at their age level.

"I call them family-functioning courses, with an emphasis on fun. They teach children some of the tools that their parents are using so that the whole family is working together as a whole," said Silverstein.

Silverstein's programs for parents, children, and teachers are based on the book by Kathryn Kvolos of the same name, "Redirecting Children's Behavior."

"I do add some of my own tools and techniques that I've picked up," said Silverstein, who is a New Jersey certified teacher and has been trained and certified by the Florida-based International Network for Children and Families.

Above all, the Living At Peace programs try to impart the idea that "the method you use is the message you teach," said Silverstein. When a parent is frustrated by a child's behavior, she said, it is tempting to ask, "What is the matter with your head?"

Instead, Silverstein suggested, practice three steps: "Describe what you see. Describe how you feel. Describe what you want," she advised. "Practice anger without insult. You can be angry with your kids, just don't insult them."

Living At Peace will be offering a five-week Redirecting Children's Behavior for parents starting tomorrow from 7-10 p.m. An intensive weekend session also will be held on Nov. 19-20 from 10:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. at 3 E. Main St., Flemington. Registration is available on-line at www.livingatpeace.com.

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