

**Parenting Tips**  
**Trempealeau County Promoting Safe and Stable Families**  
**By**  
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**How You See It Makes a Difference**

How do you see the situation when you are having trouble getting your child to help mow the lawn or clean up the kitchen? Do you perceive your child as being lazy or uncooperative? Is there a way parent and child might be able to see one another's viewpoint?

If the parent perceives the situation as a flaw in the child's character, it often limits responses to something like nagging or calling attention to the problem -- a strategy that is RARELY SUCCESSFUL.

How can a parent change his/her perceptions and responses to this problem? Following the strategy of Johann Goethe can help the child to respond more favorably to parent's expectations. In Goethe's words, *"If you treat people as if they were what they ought to be, you help them to become what they are capable of being."*

The following tips can help us interact with our children:

- 1) **Check to see if your perception of the problem is accurate.** We base our ideas of another's behavior on our values, beliefs, and experiences and do not see the problem from the same point of view as the child. To get the true meaning of the situation, we need to take time to get more information such as:
  - **"Do you mean** this isn't a good time to ask for help mowing? When can it work for you?"
  - **"Are you feeling** too overwhelmed to help me now?"
- 2) **Define your own problem with the situation rather than identifying the problem as your child's behavior.** Here is an example. "My problem with putting off mowing lawn is that if we let it grow longer, the whole lawn will need to be raked. All of us have plans for the next few days that make this job difficult to accomplish and my frustration level is rising. What can be done to solve this problem?"
- 3) **Avoid stereo-typing.** If parents hold the idea that teenagers are difficult, any behavior on the teen's part will be seen as the teen just being the typical troublesome teen. This does not allow the child to be recognized for being a person in his own right. Also, the teen may think, "If they expect me to be difficult, I may as well behave that way."
- 4) **Provide your child positive character labels.** *"Give a dog a bad name and he'll live up to it,"* is an example of Appalachian folk wisdom. It shows that what we either believe about others or ourselves can become true because we tend to act in accordance with what we believe. Therefore, look for the good in your child's behavior and give the child recognition for that trait. If you believe it, it will come to pass.

Parents can even look at a negative trait and turn it into something more positive. For example, if you have a tendency to think of your child as stubborn, change your perspective and think of it as **perseverant**.

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