

the children "bad," or we can suspend our negative judgments and use the Power of Love to see all these behaviors as calls for help.

On the other hand, when a child makes a decision we like, most of us accept that he has earned our positive regard. We often express this through praise, the underlying message of which is, "When you do what I want, you earn my love." This links love with approval, making love conditional on behavior. Many adults have internalized this kind of thinking, seeking approval and struggling to please others. We act appropriately not because we love others, but because we fear they won't love us.

Adults who link love with approval consequently withhold love from children when they make mistakes or behave hurtfully. Children who repeatedly make poor choices generally feel poorly about themselves. They often are the ones who did not experience enough family privilege to develop trust and the perception that the world is safe. Withholding love and positive regard from these children reinforces the negative beliefs they hold about themselves and the world. The Power of Love sees a call for help and a seed of potential behind these defensively guarded children who are hurtful to themselves and others. We must be willing to see these children differently so they can see themselves differently.

I've noticed I make terrible choices when I'm feeling unsure, undeserving or not good enough. I'm often short-tempered and critical towards others and myself during these times. I may also overwork and find other ways to indulge my feelings of failure. At these times I need compassion, not lectures that provoke more guilt within me. The same idea applies to children who are acting out.

While visiting an inner city middle school, I was looking for the office to sign in as a visitor. It was a large school and I was lost. I turned a corner. Standing in front of me was a six-foot tall student spray-painting obscenities on the wall outside of the gym. We spotted each other and froze. I must admit my first reaction was one of complete shock. I contemplated running and I am sure he pondered the same. However, I calmed myself down, consciously relaxed my body and harnessed the Power of Love to see the best in him. "You wanted to let everyone know you've had a bad day and a very hard life, based on what you're writing." He stood there just staring at me. I continued, "Who in this school do you think cares about you?" He mumbled, "No one." I said, "Well, that is a problem. Given your answer, what you are doing makes complete sense to me." He started to lower his spray can and his shoulders relaxed slightly. I asked, "Is there anyone in the school that some of the kids trust." He responded, "Coach Carnes, I guess." "Well then," I said, "That's who we need to go see."

Believe it or not, he led me to Coach Carnes. The three of us then began a discussion about helping this young man be successful at school and planning how he would clean the gym wall.

I started the interaction by breathing so I could consciously choose to see the best in him before opening my mouth and saying, "You wanted to let everyone know you have had a bad day." How do you think the outcome would have changed if I had reacted from an emotional state ("What do you think you are doing by destroying school property?") or survival state (running toward or away from him) instead of self-calming enough to access the Power of Love?

Finding fault in others means we are more invested in blame and punishment than we are in change, or that we are too triggered to problem solve. Refusing to see the call for help labels