

Empowering Your Kids - Summer 2005

The Jewish News

We often interfere in our children's lives whereas we might do better to give them a greater sense of their own responsibility.

We tend to interfere in our children's lives and give them advice that is not always asked for. We do this because we think we know what is best for them. However, this is not always true. How do we know what's best for our children to do when it comes to their friendships and all that happens at school? Surely, our children know their friends better than we do – what makes them tick, what makes them angry, what makes them happy. They know that dynamics of the playground – who is friendly with whom and the attitude of the teachers in the classroom. We aren't there, so how can we know?

The child sees the reality of the situation he or she is unhappy with, whereas we can often perceive the situation as less serious or more serious than how the child sees it. For example, a parent might see their child as being bullied whereas the child sees other children being treated in the same way and does not consider himself to be bullied.

So what do we do when our children tell us about a problem they have? We should listen to everything they have to say and discuss the problem with them. We should ask them if they want to do anything about it. It is likely that, as they have told you about it, they do. Ask your child what they think they could do about the situation: are their solutions possible or realistic?

If they feel they are, discuss their ideas in more detail and talk about the potential outcomes of their problem-solving so they are prepared for expected and unexpected results. Next, get them to try out their new problem-solving technique. Hopefully it will work but, if it doesn't, discuss other ideas they would like to try. If the problem is academically related - your child does not understand a certain subject, for example - then it is your child who knows which part they are having difficulty with.

They may express their concern with us, but they are the ones who should be communicating with the teacher initially. If they are failing at a subject at school, get them to discuss with the teacher how they can improve. Does their teacher have any ideas about how they can tackle the subject they find difficult? The direct approach rather than an approach through the parents means the child hears the teacher's ideas first hand. The same goes for friendships. If your children are not getting on with their friends get them to discuss the reasons why things have not been the same. Only the group of friends know what they think, feel and only they understand the whole situation.

We only ever hear half a story from our children, so why not leave it to those who have the complete picture?