

Send Consistent Signals

I was travelling home by plane recently and a stressed young family came aboard and then sat across the aisle from me. They had two small boys who were not impressed with the notion of seat-belts, and the constraint of not being able to wander at will. I watched with interest as mum chose the window seat with Dad consigned to the aisle seat, and the two lads in between.

If Dad had thought he was going to enjoy the in-flight entertainment, he was sadly mistaken. The boys appeared to have a fascination for the toilet on board the plane, a desire to check out who was travelling and a set of lungs each that sounded very healthy on occasions.

Mum tried distracting the pair, with limited success. She would then look in despair at her husband and convey very eloquently, in total silence, that he had become the designated carer for the next set of needs. The two small boys should certainly have slept well that night when we landed in Brisbane. They had expended a significant amount of energy.

In contrast that with an experience I had recently out shopping. There were quite a few of us waiting at the various check-outs. The call went over the system for all available check-out operators to come to the front. A pleasant young man came to the check-out closest to me.

He indicated to me that I could now unload on the vacant check-out right next to me. I spoke to the lady who was waiting patiently in front of the next check-out and asked her if she wanted to go first. She had a toddler quietly sitting on the trolley seat. She gratefully smiled and proceeded to come to the new check-out. Her young lad looked at me and shyly smiled and played peek-a-boo briefly. As she left, she again thanked me for letting her go first.

Choices. We don't all respond the same way in our circumstances. Yet our children seem to pick up so many of our hidden signals as parents that we

possibly are not even aware we are giving out. We have the freedom to react to circumstances as we choose. But have you realised how much is being picked up?

While many personal and contextual factors were at play in the families I observed on the plane and in the shop, in both cases parent signals were one factor that influenced the children's behaviour.

The challenge for us as parents and teachers is to be aware of the various signals we are giving intentionally or otherwise. In many cases, it is the body language that conveys far more than we realise. What do you convey without realising it? Is it love and security, or is it the tension of stress and unhappiness?

“ **Wouldn't it be great if the signal we gave out to our children or students was consistently the message of unconditional love? We love you enough to care. We love you enough to discipline you.** ”

Sadly we tend to zero in on unacceptable behaviour. We should love our students and children enough to catch them being good. We should highlight the positives. More change is effected by encouragement than by censure.

God has shown through so many events and actions that He is a God of love. He shows it, but more importantly, He acts it because He in fact is Love. Wouldn't it be great if the signal we gave out to our children or students was consistently the message of unconditional love? We love you enough to care. We love you enough to discipline you. We love you enough to make sure our signals convey that consistency of care and security regardless of what happens or what you do.

