

In a Pickle...

Pickle jars have changed very little over the years...they seem to have endured the test of time. All of us will have struggled to get the lid off when our hands were small and the lid seemed so big.

I remember helping my mother in the kitchen when I was a child and getting a pickle jar out of the fridge. After trying valiantly to get the lid off, I gave up, told my mother that it was, "stuck" and put it on the counter within her reach. She did nothing and I stood patiently, assuming that she would assist me. As the time passed I began to wonder if she was either mad at me or didn't see the pickle jar. Eventually I asked her to open it for me.

Her response surprised me..."I could do it, but can you?"

Without Internet and Mr. Google, I turned to my father for his strong hands. But alas, it became clear that he and my mother were silently communicating again. He pretended to be asleep, although his snoring was quieter than normal. My older brother was out on a date and the dog wasn't interested.

But I wanted a pickle and giving up was not an option.

I thought about power tools, imagined having bigger hands, considered dropping it, cried a bit, gave up (temporarily), went back in the kitchen near my mother (no response!) and then remembered the little used *Encyclopedia Britannica* in the bookcase. After what seemed like an eternity of checking various headings including, "pickles", "jars", "openings", "stuck", and many more...eventually I stumbled on a picture of a person holding a jar under the tap...hmmm...

My mother now offered to help (somewhat), turned the water on hot and gave me instructions on how to hold it over the sink to avoid a mess and avoid the hot water on my hands...well, mostly to avoid the hot water...

I remember holding it for several minutes expecting it was going to miraculously open on its own, eventually once again "giving up" and dropping it into the sink, hitting the top with my hand, getting mad and using the wet cloth to try and twist it...my mother quickly jumped in, held the bottom and "Pop!" the lid moved...

Mom then sat down with me and went through a careful explanation of how the heat, the "drop" and the wet towel each contributed to the solution and I got it. Yes, I proudly consumed a pickle that day and I would tell you that there is NO pickle jar today that I will not get open.

So what's the lesson here? Well, at the risk of going against the grain, or on many days the Tsunami that has become the "*Anti-Bullying Campaign*", I want to challenge parents,

teachers, authority figures, caregivers, and really anyone that loves our children, to take a minute to re-think our approach to conflict.

I sense we are facing a pickle jar here and are disempowering our children from learning some important healthy life lessons that can help them develop strong, independent, pro-social skills and personal abilities. The concept of bullying has now come to be identified with nearly every disagreement, difference of opinion and divergence of thought or actions between any two or more people or groups. I see an enormous amount of blaming others, asking authority figures to solve all problems or massive avoidance of day-to-day life challenges. I hear teachers being blamed, schools being blamed, agencies being blamed, parents being blamed...all under the heading of "Antibullying".

Don't misunderstand me, true bullying has NO place in our children's world. But our definition of this has now become so broad that frankly I see it as a detriment to use this word at all. Bullying for me refers to the systematic oppression of a person or group by another or others in a persistent and planned manner. Bullies know what they are doing and feel empowered by it. Bullies are known and repeat their activities until challenged. In my opinion, bullies are easily spotted and just as easily dealt with. They are often alone, frightened and believe that being powerful will compensate for their sense of inadequacy. They respond to group pressure, planned strategies and avoid situations where they think they cannot "win".

Bullying DOES NOT refer to kids arguing over a toy or even pushing during a playground activity. It does not refer to occasional name calling, picking one friend over another, bragging about a possession or highlighting someone else's mistake. These are events that children need to develop pickle jar strategies to solve. These are opportunities for our children to face a "stuck lid", look for solutions, get some help with some new choices and then look at the results of their efforts. These are situations where adults need to challenge the combatants to sit down and solve the problem. together with each other and not simply by calling on an adult in a position of power (sounds like a bully to me!). In fact, I think there are many times the adults should simply leave well enough alone. If a situation becomes repetitive, then we can step in and help.

We want our children to become independent and self-assured. We want them to know they can trust themselves and others to work toward a common good. We want them to realize that they possess the ability to discover the wonders of the world and interactions with others. I often hear sayings like, "Children are the Future". Solving problems independently is a much needed ability our children must have to deal with the future.

I respect others opinions regarding this and would encourage further dialogue. Heck, practice what you preach, right?

To this day, I still love pickles.

Dr. Jim