

Character Council of Indiana

GENTLENESS vs. ***HARSHNESS***

“Showing consideration and personal concern for others.”

How gentle are you towards others?

- Have you developed self-discipline in order to be attentive to the hurts and needs of others?
- When you give instructions or responses to others, do you take into consideration their weaknesses and limitations?
- Are you irritable and reactionary when people with needs intrude upon your time or energy?
- Do you give a soft answer so that you do not offend or discourage others?

Gentleness commitment:

- I will show good manners
- I will reject violence as a solution to my problems
- I will look for ways to ease the pain of others
- I will not annoy or irritate others
- I will seek to be a peacemaker

By: Steve Becker

My wife Avis and I will celebrate our 30th wedding anniversary this summer, and I am slowly learning how to be a better husband. One of the things that I have learned that Avis does not appreciate when I am hurt, frustrated, or under stress are harsh words.

The story of the little boy who struggled with harsh words illustrates the *power of words*. This little boy's father wanted to teach him a lesson. One day, he gave his son a feather pillow and told him to take it to the field, shake out all the feathers, then bring the pillowcase back. The little boy had great fun as the strong winds blew the feathers far away in the fields surrounding their field. When he finished, the little boy returned the empty pillowcase to his father. His father then said, “Son, I want you to go back to the field and put all the feathers back in the pillow”. The boy responded, “Dad, have you looked outside and seen how windy it is? Those feathers are gone forever.” The wise father responded, “That is just the point son. Those feathers are just like your words. Once you let them go, you can never get them back.”

One of the keys to avoiding harsh words is the character quality of gentleness, “Showing consideration and personal concern for others.” The tone of a person's voice can cut or soothe the deepest reaches of the soul. Learn how to be gentle, even when you least feel like it. Remember, people often need love most when they deserve it least. Use self-control when your natural inclination is a harsh word, and chose the high road of good character by responding with gentleness.

Harshness is defined as “disagreeable to the senses, especially to the sense of ***hearing***”. Harsh words therefore are at the heart of the problem. If you have ever gone through a *Character First! Leadership Training* at which I was the presenter, you have heard me share my personal struggles with anger in the past. Anger and bitterness have damaged many of my relationships over the years; even with those I love and cherish most. As a father, I fear that have said angry words to my family that I forgot the next day, words that I fear still reverberate in their minds today even though they have forgiven me for saying them.

One of the things that I have learned over the years is to ask forgiveness when I fail. This has been a relationship saver for me, especially when I have said harsh words. When you and I fail to be gentle, we need to remember to ask forgiveness immediately. Relationships are priceless! Investing in relationships will pay dividends that we will value for a lifetime.