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Why Don’t You Understand?

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Let’s consider the four thinking styles explained by Susie Walter in her book, Why Don’t You Understand? Think which may be easiest for you:

• Logical style thinkers focus on facts, want a logical reason based on data to do things, like to use numbers, manage money and have a clear bottom line.

• Practical style people get things done, like orderly instructions, make detailed plans, and are reliable, neat and organized.

• Relational individuals focus on maintaining relationships, being supportive and seeing that everyone’s needs are met. They value conversations that are meaningful and even intimate.

• Creative style thinkers connect things in original ways, are willing to take risks, are imaginative, and can be spontaneous and flexible.

Most of us have one or two preferred styles, perhaps biologically programmed. All four are good, strong, helpful and necessary for clear problem solving and healthful living. Each has a negative side if it is carelessly exaggerated or rigidly overdone.

Let’s consider, briefly, how these styles are evident when parents provide discipline: When using a healthy perspective, the logical parent holds firm limits and gives clear directions. The practical parent explains how to do things with a step-by-step approach and develops ways to track progress on goals (having a sticker chart, for example). The creative parent uses humor appropriately to lighten things up and makes everyday chores and tasks fun. The relational parent encourages effort and improvement—not just results—and notices and gives attention to positive behavior, avoiding giving negative attention.

The logical parent may yell and threaten, is rigid and rarely negotiates. They debate, trying to convince rather than discuss an issue. The practical parent may resist necessary changes, forget to make fun and playing with children a priority, struggle with doing “messy” children’s activities, and is overly responsible, taking over children’s responsibilities. The creative parent can be inconsistent and make too many exceptions, may minimize children’s negative behavior, and avoid holding children accountable for their behavior. The relational parent may try to negotiate everything rather than hold firm on issues of health, safety and respect; use emotions to manipulate; and can’t stand children being sad or mad, giving in to relieve their own uncomfortable feelings.

No style is better than another, but it’s important to recognize the different styles in others and adapt to them. Then, we are less likely to assume we are right and others are wrong. As parents, when we differ in our thinking we can compromise on approaches that respect the preferences of one another and our children. In this way, we can show respect for each family member’s preference, learn to recognize and speak each other’s languages, avoid misunderstandings and recrimination, and communicate effectively.

I am reminded of Ellen White’s statement, “It is in the order of God that persons of varied temperament should associate together. When this is the case, each member of the household should sacredly regard the feelings and respect the rights of others. By this means mutual consideration and forbearance will be cultivated, prejudices will be softened, and rough points of character smoothed. Harmony may be secured, and the blending of the varied temperaments may be a benefit to each” (The Adventist Home, p. 427).

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