

Family Scenario #3: Slam it Just One More Time

Yvonne, my six year old daughter lets me and everyone else know when she is mad. She stomps up stairs and slams doors. She mumbles and rolls her eyes. Yvonne needs to express herself. My mom says that I need to train Yvonne the way she should go and when she grows up I will be proud of her.

Yvonne really pushed my button one day. I really didn't want to spank her, and I knew she needed to stop this type of behavior. I told her to slam the door 25 times to get her frustrations out.

After 25 times, her arms were tired and my ears hurt.

Questions to discuss:

1. What values do you see expressed?
2. What might have led to the development of these values?
3. What parenting practice identified in NEPEM do you see displayed?
4. How is the parent feeling? How is Yvonne feeling?
5. Based on your cultural background, how would you as a parent respond to this situation?
6. What role, if any, as a professional working with this family could you play in this scenario?

Sample Responses

1. What values do you see expressed?

Values of Yvonne: expressing her emotions openly

Values of Yvonne's mother: children need to express their emotions. Spanking is not desired. Children's independence and individuality should be recognized.

Values of Yvonne's grandmother: Children are to be trained. Also, parents are responsible and can mold their children to who they want them to be.

2. What might have led to the development of these values?

For Yvonne's mother her values might have been influenced by her own mother. Also, her value of not spanking may have come from her own experience of being spanked by her parents, and now not wanting to repeat that with her own children. Also, her values might have been influenced reading she has done, or situations she has seen with other families.

3. What parenting practice identified in NEPEM do you see displayed?

Carefor Self: Yvonne's mother tried to reduce her stress by letting Yvonne slam the door and get worn out. She seems to be recognizing her personal strengths of patience.

Understand: She appears to understand that it is important for Yvonne's development to find a way to release her anger. However, it is not clear if she understands the control that Yvonne has asserted over the situation.

Guide: She is trying to teach Yvonne a way to cope with her anger e.g., redirecting the behavior to slamming the door 25 times.

4. How is the parent feeling? How is Yvonne feeling?

The parent is feeling overwhelmed and somewhat lost. She was caught between not wanting to spank Yvonne and at the same time needing to do something to stop Yvonne's behavior.

Yvonne is angry and then feels exhausted after the door slamming exercise.

5. Based on your cultural background, how would you as a parent respond to this situation?

Based on my multicultural background i.e., having grown up both in the U.S. and Malaysia, I would have done what Yvonne's mother had done by redirecting her behavior. Perhaps I would suggest to Yvonne that when she is mad she can punch a pillow. Perhaps I would have told her to punch a pillow 25 times. I would not have allowed Yvonne to slam the door 25 times. For one, it can damage the door and costly to repair, and secondly we may be inadvertently teaching the child it's OK to destroy properties when you are angry. I also would have found a time to talk to Yvonne when she had calmed down to find out what is making her so angry. Perhaps together we could come up with some specific things to do to lessen her anger. I would clearly state my expectations to Yvonne (e.g., We do not slam doors because it can knock pictures off the walls, damage the door and hurts people's ears), and identify a consequence for when she slams doors (e.g., take away a privilege and do a chore that is appropriate for her age).

6. What role, if any, as a professional working with this family could you play in this scenario?

As a professional, I could commend Yvonne's mother for asserting her authority and taking control of the situation. I could praise her on the patience she is showing with her child. I could ask the mother how she is feeling and visit with her about Yvonne's stage of development stage and what would be considered normal for a child this age (socially, emotionally, cognitively). I could help the mother think of alternative strategies to help Yvonne calm down while recognizing her needs at this stage and ways to appropriately meet these needs.