



# Relationships The Adlerian Team

## The power of choice

By Sue Smarkala

Our lives are defined by the choices we make: from the time we get up in the morning and decide what we will eat, to the friends we have and the careers we develop. The act of choice is an interesting phenomenon. In choosing one thing we are, in that same instant, not choosing something else. For instance, when we choose to watch a television program, we are choosing not to read, not to call a friend, or not to chat with a family member. The way we make choices is actually complex. Our choices are the result of the interaction of our mood, our mindset and attitudes, what we are thinking and how we are feeling. Let's take a look at two mindsets/attitudes that can significantly impact the quality of our relationships with others. In particular, let's focus on our role as parents.

Marilee Goldberg talks about the Learner/Judger Model. She states that each of us has a Learner Mindset and a Judger Mindset that we use throughout our lives. The Learner mindset comes from a position of wanting to understand, wanting to open up possibility, and encouraging open discussion of a topic. The Judger mindset is one which already knows what to do and is trying to move forward with only that information. We use these mindsets in a blended way; that is, we are not always operating from either mode. Generally, one of these attitudes is dominant at any point in time.

The Learner mindset has a very different impact on our relationships in comparison to the Judger mindset. Using the Learner mindset, we can open up possibility with our children and model positive approaches to choice. Let's examine the two mindsets:

Learner	Judger
Responsive and thoughtful	Reactive and automatic
Multiple perspectives	Own point of view only
Possibilities unlimited	Possibilities limited
Relationships are win-win	Relationships are win-lose
Dialogue	Debate
Supportive	Intolerant
Accepting	Judgmental
Flexible and adaptive	Inflexible and rigid

The ability to make effective life choices is a life skill parents want to develop in their children. By participating in a family that focuses on a Learner style of mindset, children learn curiosity, create win-win solutions to situations and develop a love of learning, all through feeling inspired and successful in their lives.

Through our conversation with our children we can open up or close down possibility. By paying attention to the words we choose, we can make an important contribution to our children's mindset and attitudes.

Child:

Can we go to the show tonight? I want to see XYZ.

Parent (Judger):

I don't think so. That's a pretty scary movie, and it's too late to go now.

or

That's a silly movie. Let's go see ABC.

Parent (Learner):

That's an interesting choice of movie! It's a pretty scary one, isn't it?

or

It's already 5:30 pm, and we were going to go see Grandpa and Grandma tonight, remember? They are expecting us. Let's talk more about options for movies later tonight.

Moving from a Judger mindset to more of a Learner mindset – is about choices we make as parents in the ways we relate to others. We model our mindset constantly: in our conversations with our children, our spouses and in our conversations with and about others. So, how can we move to a more Learner mindset?

**Awareness:** The first step is to be aware of our mindset at any point in time. Am I in my Judger mindset and is that where I want to be? Will this get me the results I want?

**Exploration of choices:** Where would I rather be? How could I be a Learner in this situation? What are my choices?

**Commitment:** Make your choice and act on it.

So often as parents, spouses, employees, we succumb to a reactive approach to life. The busyness of life, the myriad of roles we play – so much of what we do is on autopilot. We may not be actively creating the lives we want. We can use the Learner/Judger model as a way to begin to look at our choices and our interactions with others. We can bring more fun, cooperation, community and energy into our lives by choosing to be Learners in all areas of our lives. And watch our children doing the same.

Ref: Goldberg, M. (1998). *The art of the question*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

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