



Refresh the Day

By M.J. Clark, APR

When I take my two sons to the grocery store, it's usually a struggle. They want everything they see, and I don't want to buy it all for them. And yet I don't want to be the frugal mom that *never* buys them anything special either. They usually end up conning me into several things each time, and I usually end up mad at myself when I'm in line with a cart full of junky toys and candy that they don't need.

So this scenario began to play out again at the grocery store about a month ago, after an especially challenging day, and I had simply had it. I explained to them that I was upset, they were getting NOTHING this time, and I would not be taking them to the grocery store with me ever again because I found their badgering exasperating. I felt very upset with them, and the kids were then very displeased with me too.

As we continued shopping, I thought more carefully about what just happened. I was essentially blaming them for my not being able to say no. I was the one who made the situation unpleasant. They are kids, so of course they are going to ask me to buy them things. It's up to me, as the adult, to be able to say no when I want to say no without overreacting, as I had just done, or feeling guilty about my decision. And clearly the notion of *never* taking them to the store with me again was unrealistic. How would I fix this situation?

So we were all three silent and angry at one another, and not feeling at all like being together. And, for some reason, I thought about the "refresh" button on the Internet. I thought, I wish we could just refresh the day and begin anew.

So I said to them, "Why don't we just refresh the day? Let's pretend we all had a great day, and nothing that just happened has happened. You guys didn't ask for anything on this trip to the store, and I didn't say any of what I said to you. I don't want to feel mad, and I don't want you guys mad at me either. It's just hard for me to say no, so I get upset when I have to say it over and over again. So, if you agree, we can just start the day all over again. What do you think?"

"I like the idea," my 7-year-old said. "Let's refresh the day."

So we did. We all started talking again, and we ended our shopping excursion on a very pleasant note. Trips to the store have been much more enjoyable since that day, and when the boys begin to realize they are asking for a bunch of things, and they can see me becoming frustrated, one of them will usually now say, "I'm sorry, Mom. Let's just refresh the day." That always cracks us up, and it always lightens the mood.

I think kids are so much smarter than we give them credit for, but they do have limitations based on their young age. And sometimes we forget about that, and we have unrealistic expectations of how they should behave. When I become upset with my sons, I often say to myself, "They are kids. Is this behavior age-appropriate?" If I determine that it is, then I take a minute to analyze my own feelings and try to understand my role in what's taking place. That is where I usually find the answers. Sometimes my own behavior is not age appropriate. But until I identify it and admit it, I can't work to change it.

This same scenario plays out in the workplace every day. When someone else does something that really bothers you, ask yourself why the behavior bothers you (how does it make you feel?), what outward reaction it elicits from you, and what you can do to ensure your behavior is more constructive the next time. Although there are many people in the workplace whose behavior you may deem to be not age-appropriate, we cannot control them. We can only control our reaction to what they do. And, in reacting, we can choose our own level of maturity.