



Using The *Three Way Sort* In Parent Counseling

“a favorite intervention tool” – by Lynn Clark, PhD



When you counsel parents (caregivers, teachers, etc.) you will be asking them how they have been handling the behavioral and emotional problems of a particular child. And you will be asking for various examples. Listen to their specific examples of managing behavior problems and mentally make a three way sort of their examples. *The Three Way Sort* is noting what the parent is doing right, what the parent is doing wrong, and what new methods he or she needs to start doing. I have found the *Three Way Sort* to be especially practical and useful.

1.

What is she doing right?

2.

What is she doing wrong?

3.

What does she need to start doing?

1. What is she doing right? Note and quickly reinforce these methods. Parents entering parent counseling usually expect criticism. By noting and reinforcing what they are doing right, they will feel supported and encouraged. And they will increase these good parenting behaviors.

2. What is she doing wrong? Slowly discourage the parent from using these methods (e.g., harsh spanking).

3. What does she need to start doing? Introduce new helpful techniques and strategies that the parent is not now using. Slowly teach these new techniques (such as logical consequences, reflective listening, etc.) for managing behavior. Many of these techniques will come from the *Menu of Interventions for 46 Problem Behaviors* in SOS pp. 233 to 242.

Personally, I take notes as a parent describes his attempts to manage his child's behavior. What I learn from this parent's attempts to manage behavioral and emotional problems, I write in the three categories. When you prepare written reports, enter staff notes, or make recommendations, use information from your *Three Way Sort*. As a counselor, the *Three Way Sort* helps you to generate many practical, specific recommendations to help a caregiver to improve specific behavioral and emotional problems of a child.

Also, use the *Three Way Sort* when you consult with teachers, caretakers, and other professionals in order to help them to better help their children. The *Three Way Sort* is an excellent technique for case consultation with other professional helpers.

