



## Copycat



I was recently asked by a rather desperate mum if I had any ideas to pass on to her about her two young sons, who copied each other all day long. It didn't matter whether it was good or bad, what one did the other one did and vice versa! I suppose the real question is, 'How do you get each one to be themselves?', breaking the drive to be like each other.

It always helps to talk so I suggested setting up a dialogue with the questions, 'Why did you copy your brother?' and 'Do you realise that you've got your brother into trouble?' and to the copier, 'Do you realise that your brother got you into trouble because you copied him?' That could be quite challenging if two little chaps aren't prepared to stop long enough to enter the dialogue, so set the scene of standing still or sitting still, fixing their gaze on you as you fix yours on them, and of not allowing any explanations or excuses or cheek because mum is the one who is speaking. Never give up; anticipate a good response with something like, 'Well, you won't be doing that again, will you?', even though it will be done again because they will continue to try it on.

Secondly establish the code of conduct henceforth and the consequences should they not listen, for example, saying sorry to each other and meaning it or, to slow them down, write a note of apology or draw a picture to say sorry if they're too young to write. Ultimately to say 'sorry' to mummy. Thirdly, should there be no apparent desire to listen or apologise, a little time of separation from each other's company might settle them down.

Fourthly, confession is good for the soul, so they can tell daddy what happened, what mummy did about it and whether they agreed with her or not. Daddy can back mummy up and decide on his own sanctions, should they carry on with the same behaviour the following day. Fifthly and finally, apologies and good behaviour merit rewards so lots of praise and perhaps doing something nice together, or separately if one or the other refuses to cooperate.

The importance of breaking this trait early on saves trouble later; for instance, copying bad behaviour at school to get attention or to be different and prove that I'm 'the big boy'.

Copying is an attempt to make up for what they feel is lacking in them. It will come out in wanting to do better, be better and even have better than someone else. Again, the importance of setting up a good non-judgemental dialogue with our children is paramount. To a child, who better to understand them than Dad or Mum? Use the conversations to help your children understand their own value and the value of what they have. Teach them that people matter more than things or success.

Final thought – are we setting a good example for them to copy? Do they see us living out those principles in our own lives?

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