

Alpine County Choose Civility Campaign

(An initiative of the County Superintendent of Schools)



May Focus:

Accept and Give Constructive Criticism

Although it is sometimes hard to accept, constructive criticism can be viewed as a gift to be put to good use. If we reject criticism, we may lose out on what can be a good source of wisdom. In most criticism, there is something good enough to take to heart; some kernel of advice that leads to self improvement. The least we can do is ask ourselves if there might be valid points in the criticism. Then, we can respond in a civil manner such as, “I believe you’re right.” Criticism can help us learn what we are unable or unwilling to learn by ourselves. It is helpful to be open minded and really listen rather than simply prepare how you’ll defend yourself.

To offer constructive criticism to others can be very tricky and takes thought. Before you offer up criticism, it’s important to look closely at your intention. Be sure you are planning to help with a problem and not to humiliate someone or exact revenge. Consider if there really is a problem you can help with and if it’s the right time and place to bring up the issue. Even our first president, George Washington, recognized this. He said, “Being to advise or reprehend anyone, consider whether it ought to be in public or in private; presently or at some other time, in what terms to do it and in reproving show no sign of anger, but do it with all sweetness and mildness.” In other, modern words:

- Decide if there really is an issue that your criticism might help solve
- Describe what you have observed
- Show you understand how the receiver might feel
- Suggest a solution, if one is warranted
- Remain kind and empathetic

Our choices of words are especially important when offering constructive criticism to children. Consider how much more effective it would be to say to a child, “In the future, please remember to turn off the hall light” instead of “You left the hall light on again. That wastes so much money!”

Of course, there are times when children or adults should be reprimanded or guided much more strongly, but positive and constructive criticism is very useful much of the time.