

# Principally Speaking

We're All in This Together

## Not Yet!

Back in the ice age, I had the good fortune of taking a School Law Class with one of the most well-renowned professors on the topic. The joke in the class was that when you submitted a research paper to him, it came back with more ink on it than when you handed it in. To say he had high standards was an understatement!



Fast forward almost 30 years... A phenomenon I see with today's kids is their discomfort with feedback from teachers, coaches, and parents. It is as if our kids are crushed if they don't get it right, perfectly right, the first time around. Maybe this is the result of living in a society that puts so much value on achievement and success that they are simply afraid to fail. Or maybe they have yet to realize that in the real world, success comes through hard work and the ability to stick with it. And maybe, just maybe, we as parents are partially to blame.

My stepmother was famous for her many sayings, most of which drove me crazy. One of these sayings was "Can't means won't." Oh, how I hated when she said that. Now, however, as I look back on all the times she uttered those words, I realize she was trying to motivate me. Basically, she was telling me that if I say I can't do it, what I am really saying is that I am unwilling to try to do it. Truth be told, she was probably right more often than not.

"Dad, I can't do this Math homework." "Mom, I can't find my soccer jersey." Whatever the context, we have all heard our kids use the word can't more often than we probably care to imagine. The question is...How do we respond?

Experience as both a principal and a parent has taught me that my response to our kids' use of "can't" will go a long way towards helping them develop a gritty mindset of stick-to-it-ness (I made that word up). So now when I hear kids use the word "can't," I respond with a modern-day version of "Can't means won't."

I hear..."I can't do these problems on my homework."  
I respond..."**Not yet**, but once we **practice** you'll be able."

I hear..."I can't kick the ball like that."

I respond..."You haven't learned how **yet.**" **What can we do** to learn how?"

I hear..."I can't read these words."

I respond..."You haven't learned how yet. Now, let's **get to work.**"

By responding in this manner, the focus is no longer upon what the child can or cannot do, but rather upon the effort required for him/her to get there.

I often wonder how my School Law Professor would respond to "I can't." For some reason, I think I already know:).

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