



TOP

Tips on Parenting

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Changing the World: We Begins With Me

by Martha Whitaker

Years ago, our family vacation was interrupted by a terrible automobile accident. Fortunately, no one was badly hurt but our car was a mangled mess and we were miles from a town. My then six-year old daughter's words still ring in my ears. "Mommy, what will we DO?" Together, one decision at a time and with the help of emergency workers and other kind folks, we decided what to do. We took the necessary steps and eventually our lives returned to normal.

Terrifying incidents in our nation's schools have left many parents asking with a fear not unlike my daughter's, "What will we DO?" In the wake of violence, experts and everyday citizens search for answers. Fortunately, there are many things parents can DO to help their children--pre-schoolers and beyond--mature into compassionate, caring individuals who are able to cope with a less-than-perfect world. In the process, we all become stronger and restore our faith in our ability to DO what will make a difference.

WE begins with ME...

Celebrate individuality. If the world is to be a place where we can all get along, we must teach our littlest citizens tolerance. They must learn to value others and appreciate the importance of living together peacefully. But, ironically, this can only happen if children learn to delight in their own way of being in the world. Fortunate is the child whose individuality is cause for celebration from the moment they draw their first breath. Children learn their worth from those who care for them. They see their gifts reflected in the eyes of appreciative observers. Gender, personality traits, and particular abilities combine in one-of-a-kind ways to make each child quite remarkable. Season all your conversations with genuine appreciation and stir in plenty of hugs. "I love spending time with you!" "What a great



idea!" "Good for you!" And, as often as you can each day, give your child the gift of your undivided attention.

...Noticing the goodness in others...

Notice the goodness in others. When children feel secure about their own worth they are able to begin noticing the worth of others. Again, their primary caretakers must lead the way. Just as we notice the beautiful individuality of our own children, we can begin to model an appreciation of others for our children. Take time to help your pre-schooler set aside their naturally self-centered thinking whenever possible to notice the goodness in others. "Isn't it great the way Randall always fixes something special for us when we come to visit?" "I'm sure glad the crossing guard is there to help us every morning, aren't you?" "Did you notice anyone being kind today at pre-school?" "I'm so glad Sarita was there to help Jamal when he fell." Make the caring acts of others an ongoing focus of your child's world.

...Discussing differences openly...

Children notice differences of all kinds at a very young age. Pre-schoolers often say whatever is on their mind. "Why is that new boy's hair so lumpy?" "How come Lanae still wets her pants?" "She talks with funny words." "The man on the bus was really fat!" "Her skin looks like chocolate pudding." These comments seem embarrassing to adults but to children they are simply observations. Discuss what they notice about others calmly and supportively, always encouraging them to appreciate their differences. "You are right, that person looked different from you or me. Were you surprised? Wouldn't it be a boring world if everyone looked the same?" Teach your children that speaking out about the way someone looks can make that person feel embarrassed but encourage them to be interested in and pleased about the many differences they encounter among people.

...Treating others with care...

Teach compassion. Inspire in your children a respect for all living creatures. Study a lanky-legged spider together in awe. Stop to admire the beauty of a bird on the wing.

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Changing the World, *continued from page 1...*

Caring for pets provides a wonderful opportunity for even very young children to feel important and to learn the delicate art and important skills of nurturing. Encourage them to help you comfort a friend who's been hurt or a neighbor who needs a bit of cheering up. Notice their deeds of kindness aloud. Very young children can begin to see that they are able to make a difference in the lives of others. "Max sure appreciates the gentle way you're petting him." "Thanks for showing me that beautiful ladybug." "Shauna really appreciated those kind words." "I'll bet it feels good to have been so helpful to Mr. Sampson." Children can come to believe in themselves as compassionate, capable care-givers.

What we DO can change the world!

Sometimes our society seems as mangled as the ill-fated car and vacation plans described at the beginning of this article. Tragic acts of violence can make us shake our heads as my daughter did and ask aloud, "What will we DO?" Parents of young children can DO a great deal. The task of creating a society where human life is valued and people understand the need for being a united "WE" begins with each "ME." Children can learn what to DO. As they learn to delight in their own individuality they are strengthened to appreciate both the differences and commonalities they share with others. They can learn that they have the power to nurture, to reach out to others, and to change the world. *

~ Martha Whitaker is a professor in the Department of Elementary Education at Utah State University. She teaches the foundations of education and classroom management.

..... **Tips on Effective Discipline**

by Martha Dever

As parents, we want our children to be pleasant to be around and to behave appropriately. A good way to accomplish this is to think of discipline as an opportunity to teach appropriate behavior and build a positive sense of self (instead of as a way to control children). Two important principles for teaching appropriate behavior and building a positive sense of self are providing children with choices and structuring logical consequences for inappropriate behavior. Let's explore each of these principles.

Providing Choices

Compared to adults, children have very little control or power in their lives. This is not a bad thing because if we gave them total control and let them do whatever they

From the Editor

Please notice our new "Question Corner" feature. It consists of questions posed by parents to early childhood experts who provide brief responses in this newsletter. If you have any questions you would like answered, please send them to:

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And please don't forget to pass the word on to other parents to check TOP out and to read this newsletter online at:

<http://www.coe.usu.edu/ecc/top/index.html>

wanted, they would be neither safe nor happy. However, giving them choices that are appropriate for their age provides them with the opportunity to feel powerful and learn to make good decisions. Remember to structure choices such that you can accept whatever the child decides. Here are some examples with children of different ages.

Your three-year-old daughter will not wear the outfit you selected and insists on wearing a mismatched outfit. Try presenting a choice of two outfits you have already matched; or ask her to choose a favorite shirt and you will match it with pants. If the problem persists, you might want to take her shopping and let her pick one of two outfits, either of which you are willing to purchase.

Your five-year-old son watches too much TV. Set a limit for TV watching (perhaps one hour per day) and mark some shows in the TV guide that you feel are acceptable for viewing. Let him choose what he will watch (within the time limit). You can even extend this experience into lessons on telling time by letting him watch the clock to know when it is time to watch his shows.

Your nine-year-old daughter is not getting her homework done. Discuss this with her teacher to be sure the assignments are appropriate for her. Assuming the homework is appropriate, begin by allowing her some playtime after school as a break from the tasks of school. Then, suggest two times for doing her homework and let her choose the one she prefers. You could further empower her by suggesting a couple of different places for doing homework and letting her select one.

Logical Consequences

Many punishments do not teach children appropriate behavior. If a punishment is a logical result of their behavior, it will be a more effective way to teach appropriate behavior. We should try to avoid thinking about how we will punish the child (make him/her suffer).

Rather, we should think about what consequence makes sense and will teach appropriate behavior. Here are some examples with children of different ages.

Your three-year-old son runs into the street while playing in the yard. You might say, "It isn't safe to be in the street. We will need to go inside, but you can play in your room or in the family room." You have taken away the privilege of playing outside, which is a logical consequence of the child running into the street. You have also given the message that you will not allow playing in the street. Before letting your son play outside next time, express confidence that he will stay in the yard as expected.

Your five-year-old daughter will not pick up her toys. Forcing children to do something (picking up toys) often results in a power struggle that the adult seldom wins. Usually, both child and adult become frustrated. One logical consequence for not picking up toys might sound something like this: "You can pick up your toys or I can do it; but if I do it, I will put them away for a week so I don't have to do it again tomorrow." It is likely that your child will let you pick up the toys the first time, but when you follow through by removing them, she will know you are serious and will probably pick them up herself the next time.

Your nine-year-old son neglects to do the dishes after dinner. When children neglect their responsibilities, parents must avoid the power struggle that may result by

nagging or arguing with them. One way to handle this situation is to go ahead and do the dishes when your son neglects to do so. However, all family members have responsibilities, and it is your son's responsibility to wash the dishes. If you are doing his chores, you will need to eliminate one of yours—driving him to soccer practice perhaps. The logical consequence of fulfilling his responsibility for him is to substitute that for something else that you do for him.

Final Tips

Avoid yelling. As adults we would be appalled if our spouse, employer, or another adult yelled at us. Children feel the same way, so use your firm but friendly voice to make your point.

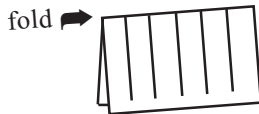
Share your approach. Be sure you discuss your discipline plan with other adults in your child's life (spouse, childcare provider, teacher, coach, etc.) and encourage them to use the same discipline strategies you are using.

Seek advice. If inappropriate behavior persists or escalates, there may be a more serious problem. Consult experts such as your child's teacher, pediatrician, school counselor, or a mental health professional, as they may be able to help you determine what is causing the behavior. *

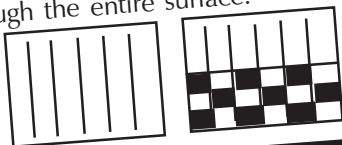
~ Martha Dever, EdD, is a mother, former kindergarten teacher, and an associate professor of Early Childhood Education at Utah State University. She is also currently serving as Interim Department Head in USU's Department of Secondary Education.

Activity Corner: PAPER WEAVING

Let your child select three pieces of construction paper in colors of choice. Fold one piece in half, and beginning at the fold, cut to within 1/2" from the edge in sections that are 1" wide.



Then cut the other two pieces of paper in 1" strips and you are ready to weave. Begin by weaving over and then under the cuts with the first strip. With the second, weave under and then over. Continue alternating the weave until strips are woven through the entire surface.



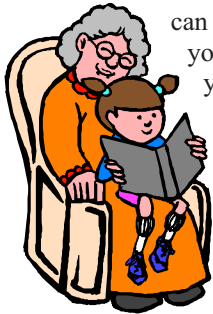
Nurturing the Spiritual Health of Children Through Literature

by Delphine Rossi

Human beings are mind, body, and spirit—interconnected. As parents, we are dedicated to helping our children become whole and healthy beings—physically, emotionally, socially and intellectually. The overlooked and sometimes forgotten health aspect of the whole child is spiritual health, the core component that serves to nurture the heart and soul of a child.

Spiritual health encompasses experiencing unconditional love, joy, faith, hope, forgiveness, and optimism. It enables us to feel a connectedness to self, others, and a higher power or larger reality. Spiritual health provides us with a sense of resiliency, personal fulfillment, and inner peace. Spiritual health does not refer to religion, although many religions incorporate spiritual practices into their system of beliefs.

Teaching children about their spiritual health through literature is a natural way to expose them to spiritual qualities in a simple manner that they can understand. The following are examples of classic and contemporary children's stories that provide opportunities to talk with children about spiritual issues and allow the enhancement of their spiritual development. Many of them can be checked out of public libraries. If you have read them with your child before, you might want to read them again to discuss the questions below.



- *Amazing Grace* by Mary Hoffman is a story that teaches hope, optimism, and personal fulfillment as Grace believes in herself and is voted to be Peter Pan in her class play.

Discussion questions: Why does Grace feel good about herself? Why is Grace not afraid to try out for the play? Who helps Grace feel she can succeed?

- *Bambi* by Walt Disney Books shows optimism, hope, and resiliency as Bambi learns to live without his mother and eventually finds love and peace in the forest. Discussion questions: How do you think Bambi felt when his mother was shot? What helped Bambi feel loved and cared for? How did Bambi feel when the forest burned? How did Bambi find happiness in the forest?
- *Beauty and the Beast* by Walt Disney Books teaches unconditional love and hope as Belle shows unconditional love to the Beast which transforms him into a gentle, loving being. Discussion questions: Why was the Beast so sad and angry? Why wasn't Belle afraid of the Beast? What did Belle see in the Beast that others didn't see? What helped the Beast to change?
- *Cinder Edna* by Ellen Jackson is a delightful parody on Cinderella. It shows how one's attitude greatly determines happiness. Cinder Edna shows optimism and hope as she looks for the positive from her experiences, accepts herself for who she really is, and learns of personal fulfillment through the simple joys of life. She turns crisis into opportunity and lives happily ever after. Discussion questions: What helps Cinder Edna feel good about her life? Why does Cinder Edna make the best out of each situation? Why is Cinder Edna's life happy?
- *Guess How Much I Love You* by Sam McBratney is a beautiful story that depicts the deep, unconditional love between a child, Little Nutbrown Hare, and a parent, Big Nutbrown Hare. It is one that will surely warm your heart. Discussion questions: What is unconditional love? How do you know I love you?
- *Koala Lou* by Mem Fox is a story in which Koala Lou

Question Corner

"My 5-year old son is a very picky eater. He refuses to eat vegetables and I worry about him getting proper nutrition. What should I do?"

~Betty in New York

First of all, remember that parents are the best example for their children. Are you eating vegetables with your meals or for snacks? In today's world, parents make so many rules about eating that oftentimes the focus at mealtime becomes the rules rather than what is being eaten. If vegetables are served with meals and parents eat them without making a big fuss, the child eventually will follow their example. In the meantime, remember that children are still developing tastes, experimenting with flavors, and going through eating phases. Don't worry too much about the phases children go through: Only eating one type of food, not wanting their food to touch each other on the plate, etc.

Children often won't eat cooked vegetables. Try serving raw vegetables or vegetables that can be eaten with their fingers. Another idea is to take inventory of your kitchen to see what types of foods you keep on hand. If there are lots of sweets or chips, vegetables will naturally take second place.

It takes a long time for your child to develop a deficiency. Don't worry as long as your child is eating some food and continues to grow appropriately. If you are serving nutritious food and modeling appropriate eating behavior, just give your child some time and space so that he can develop a taste for vegetables on his own.

-Kris Saunders, Extension Associate Professor, Utah State University

believes that she must win her mother's love after many siblings are born. In defeat of her goal to win the Bush Olympics to get her mother's attention, Koala Lou learns that her mother has always loved her unconditionally. Discussion questions: Why does Koala Lou feel she has to win her mother's love? What does unconditional love mean? Do you feel that you are loved unconditionally? Do you think love has to be won?

- *The Lion King* by Walt Disney Books demonstrates forgiveness, resiliency, and love as it describes Simba's struggle with the loss of his father and his eventual return to the pride to assume his leadership role as the king. Discussion questions: Why was Simba angry at the loss of his father? Why did he want to leave the pride? Who did Simba have to forgive to feel better? Why did Simba return to the pride?

Question Corner

"When I take my 3-year old son shopping, sometimes he has a tantrum if I won't buy him what he wants. It is very embarrassing! How should I handle this?" ~ Dave in Colorado

Sometimes without meaning to, parents reward the very behaviors they want to reduce. They do this by paying too much attention to the behaviors that they don't want, and not paying enough attention to appropriate behaviors. A parent's attention is the most important reward to a child.

So, in the store, you should try to ignore your son's fussing and calmly go about your business. Try looking at the items on the shelf as if you are deep in thought deciding what to buy. Then, as soon as he stops to take a breath during his tantrum, brightly turn to him and say "This is so fun shopping with you. Will you help me find _____?" Then pay attention to your son, talk to him, and praise him for helping.

If the tantrum has escalated to the point where this kind of response doesn't work, calmly take your son by the hand, and leave the store. You might say something brief like, "I see we'll need to do this another time." Don't lecture. That is paying extra attention to behavior you don't want. If tantrums don't work for your son, he will stop doing them. Get in the habit of "catching him being good."

Be aware that if your son has developed a pattern of tantrums, it will take a little while for things to improve. You may still see an occasional tantrum when he is tired or hungry. But, if you stick to your plan to ignore the behavior you don't want and pay attention to the behavior you do want, his tantrums will all but disappear.

-Thomas Lee, Professor & Extension Specialist, Dept. of Family & Human Development, USU

Nurturing Spiritual Health,

continued from page 4...

- *The Little Engine That Could* by Watty Piper is an excellent example of the spiritual qualities of resiliency, optimism, and personal fulfillment. The little engine demonstrates how faith and optimism in one's ability leads to success. Discussion questions: Why did the Little Engine keep trying? How did the Little Engine feel when he asked for help and other engines said no?
- *Oh, the Places You'll Go* by Dr. Seuss helps children to understand the importance of optimism and resiliency

when facing life's challenges. Discussion questions: Why is it good to be optimistic? Tell me about a time you felt optimistic about something. How do you feel when things don't turn out the way you want them to?

- *The Very Quiet Cricket* by Eric Carle is a tender story that teaches children faith and hope as the cricket continues to chirp to find one of its own kind. Discussion questions: Why didn't the cricket give up? How did the cricket feel when he met another cricket?
- *You Are Special* by Max Lucado is a wonderful story about a boy named Punchinello who discovers that he is special no matter what others may think. It teaches unconditional love, resiliency, and inner peace. Discussion questions: Is it okay to be different? Why was Punchinello special? Is everyone special? What makes you special?

Reading and discussing stories with children provides parents with teaching moments, golden opportunities to teach their children about the importance of their spiritual health. We, as parents, need to remember to teach our children about such qualities as forgiveness, hope, optimism and joy. Our attention to the whole child will enable our children to become more resilient in times of adversity, more optimistic in times of disappointment, and more hopeful during the inevitably difficult times that life brings to us all.

Additional spiritual health literature:

- Cinderella
- Free Willy
- The Little Match Girl
- The Lovables in the Kingdom of Self-Esteem
- Pocahontas
- The Secret Garden
- Sleeping Beauty
- Thumbelina
- Ugly Duckling
- The Wizard of Oz *
- Edward the Emu
- Homeward Bound I & II
- A Little Princess
- Love You Forever
- Pinocchio
- Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer
- Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs
- The Velveteen Rabbit

~ Delphine Rossi, M.S., CHES, is the coordinator of the School Health Education Program at Utah State University. She has extensive experience in the public schools teaching Health Education K-12.

Activity Corner: PAPER BAG PUPPETS

Turn a lunch-size brown paper bag upside down and draw a face on the bottom (folded) end such that the flap is the character's mouth. Draw the character's body under the face. Insert hand into the bag and make the mouth move with your fingers. Use the puppets to create stories with your children.



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 Inquiries regarding submissions should be directed to Martha Dever at 435-797-2225 or send e-mail to “dever@coe.usu.edu.” All other questions, suggestions, comments or requests for the Spanish issue should be directed to Estelle at 435-797-8629 or send e-mail to “eejcenter@coe.usu.edu.” *Thanks for reading TOP!*

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