



# First Steps

# #23

## Teachable Moments

Our children do not come with instructions. Parents Reaching Out provides resources that help families make informed decisions about the care and education of their children. We thank the Parent Education Network, a project of Parents Helping Parents of Wyoming, Inc. for permitting us to share their *Thoughts for Tots* in this information series.

One important aspect is for parents and caretakers to take advantage of the numerous teachable moments that come about everyday. Teachable moments are those flashes of time when you're going about daily activities and the situation is perfect for discussing a specific subject with your child. While teachable moments may seem like they just appear out of thin air, the truth is that parents and caregivers can make the investment of gifts that make teachable moments more frequent and more effective.

### The Gift of "Your Time"

Many teachable moments come about when there is ample time to discover, explore, and question. Teachable moments often happen

- while taking a walk.
- while playing.
- while looking at the stars.
- while driving down the road.
- while sharing a snack.
- when a child is struggling.
- while shopping.
- while reading a story.



### The gift of "Answering Questions"

- Offer extended answers to questions.
- Answer questions even in stressful or busy situations whenever possible.
- When it is not possible to fully answer, give a brief answer and then say, "Remind me to tell you a story about that after we finish this."
- Use real-life examples to explain and help them understand situations they are going through.
- When children question, it is a perfect time to help them start using a higher level of thinking.

### The Gift of Asking Your Child's Opinion

As children learn that their opinions are valued, they become more teachable. Leading questions start by asking what they think. Some ideas are:

- Why is that so interesting to you?
- How did you become the leader?
- What do you think of this idea?
- How did you feel when that happened?
- What did the story character do well?
- How would you handle this situation?

## One-Minute Teacher

Toddlers often do not have attention spans for much more than a few minutes depending upon the subject, the surroundings and the child's maturity. Consider breaking down things into one-minute lessons. Ideas are:

- Explain things in nature. During a walk, share how birds build a nest or how flowers wilt.
- Reinforce creative efforts. Praise those times when your child comes up with a new way of doing something. Let him be a "Picasso".
- Give your child lots of chances to visualize or imagine how things could be. Ask "What if...?" questions.
- Appreciate your child's efforts. As he tries to explain something, give him the self-confidence and the willingness to risk a wrong answer instead of using a safe "I don't know."
- Provide special times for just "shooting the breeze." Let the child talk about any subject she is interested in.



Source: Johnson, The One Minute Teacher.

## How Children Learn

As a society, we have lost the art of reflection, that ability to think deeply and meaningfully about issues. Instead, through media glitz and glitter, hype and pizzazz, we have learned only to feel what others are feeling as we watch what they are experiencing right before our eyes.



Some ideas to encourage your child to think deeply are:

- Read a story and ask her to discuss two or three main ideas.
- Listen to a song and ask him questions about it.
- Make up a game where she can define the rules and explain what is meant by them.
- Begin a story and let him finish it. Discuss other endings and which ones are sad, happy, or good.

Source: Unell and Wyckoff, 20 Teachable Virtues.

*For more information call Parents Reaching Out. We offer phone consultations and provide workshops in English or Spanish to communities throughout New Mexico. This publication was developed under a grant from the New Mexico Department of Health Family Infant Toddler program. However, the views here expressed do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Health and should not be assumed to be an endorsement by the New Mexico Department of Health.*