

Skills for Good Parenting: Elementary Ages - You, Your Child and The World

Life lessons often come in unexpected places. While you don't want to obsess about all of your parenting choices, how you interact with your child, how you behave out in the world, the choices you make about books, television and other media as well as your expectations for your child, yourself and other people all contribute to the person your child will develop into.

Don't feel burdened by this. Think creatively. Teachable moments happen all the time. Remember that you are always on stage for them. Stopping to let another driver turn, interacting politely with the cashier in the grocery store, volunteering at a soup kitchen, being conscientious about recycling... are these actions are observed and absorbed. Speak to your child as you want them to talk to others. Please and thank you matter. Don't be afraid to admit that you have made a mistake and apologize.

There are teachable moments in the everyday. Use yourself as an example, both good and in the needs-improvement category. Find stories, books and electronic media that model for your children ways that you want them to be in the world, that show children of different genders challenging gender roles, that show diverse faces and bodies, that show families of all different make-ups. Help them develop sense of right and wrong, both through conversation and action. Talk about respecting others, and what to do when others are not kind or respectful to them. Talk to your kids about being a global citizen and what this means.

One important lesson to teach at any age is that a child's online identity belongs to THEM, and a simple way to teach this is to ask them permission before you post their photo, or information about their accomplishments, on your Facebook page or Instagram account. This will help your child enforce the same boundaries with his friends. And of course, it's important that it isn't just you looking out for your child's safety, but that your child needs to learn how to responsibly interact online, both to protect themselves and to be a good on-line citizen.

For children this age, remember too that less electronic media is more. Instead of letting your child have unlimited access to screens, use parental controls and limit their screen time. Download audio books for long car rides and brush up on your repertoire of travel games. Don't fall into the habit of letting your child plop down in front of a screen. Keep a bin of art supplies, a shoebox of blocks, or a backpack of small stuffed animals handy to put out on the kitchen floor when you're preparing dinner or checking your work email in the evening.

Children of all ages have a moral compass, as they mature they sense and understand justice and fairness. One of the privileges of parenthood is getting to set your child on a path that allows them to become the best person they could be.

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