"CHERISHED MOMENTS" COLUMN
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The "Cherished Moments" column is written by Cathy L. Graham, County Extension Director with the Scotland County Center of the North Carolina Cooperative Extension. The following column will provide information to improve relationships between adults and children. "Cherished Moments" is dedicated to the many adults (parents, teachers, caregivers, volunteers, educators) who strive to grow and to the children who will surely benefit.

“In the final analysis, it is not what you do for your children but what you have taught them to do for themselves that will make them successful human beings.”
-- Ann Landers

Appropriate Limits for Young Children: A Guide For Discipline

Denita is 5 years old. She whines not only when she is left in child care, but during most other times when she goes from one place to another. Once she gets interested in an activity. Denita’s attention is completely focused until another child tries to join her or she is asked to put the activity away. Then she lashes out, usually throwing a toy or disrupting a corner of the room. During group time, she cries until she is allowed to sit on the teacher’s lap. Teachers give her time-outs in the beanbag chair, which she doesn’t seem to mind. When it is time to go home, she cries. Her teachers and parents are frustrated. How can Denita’s teachers and parents work toward more desirable behavior? Should she be punished or disciplined?

Punishment is taking some action against the child as a payback for a child’s behavior.

Discipline is about guiding the child and teaching the child to understand limits at home or in other settings. While you can make rules for how they should behave, most children do not begin acting with self-control until their middle childhood years (around ages 7 to 9). For children younger than this, discipline includes learning to self-control.

Children must pass through several learning and developmental stages as they mature. Discipline issues are a normal part of child development. While it appears that there are “good” and “bad” behaviors, each stage does have a positive and a negative side. Parents and teachers alike must understand these developmental stages in order to determine what behavior they can realistically expect and to decide whether a child’s behavior is appropriate.
Why Do Children Misbehave?
According to some child development experts, children usually misbehave for one of four basic reasons: attention, power, revenge, or inadequacy.

**Attention** – when children believe they “belong” only when they are noticed. They feel important when they are commanding total attention.

*While Mother was getting ready for work, Amanda jumped up from her breakfast and asked Mom to come help her in the bathroom. Encouraging her that she could manage alone, Amanda began to pull on Mom’s leg and whine, “But I may not be able to.” Mom replied, “Yes, you can, Amanda, just try it.” After a few minutes, Amanda was back asking Mom to snap her pants. Helping her, Mom resumed her routine. Amanda called to her again, “Can you come here?”*

Parents can respond by giving positive attention at other times, ignoring inappropriate behavior, setting up routines, encouraging, redirecting, or setting up special times.

**Power** – when children believe they belong only when they are in control or are proving that no one can “boss them around.”

*Whitney was ready to go shopping when Dad announced they were going to the mall. She grabbed her jar of pennies, ready to shop. At each store, she asked for items too costly for her budget. When she found an item for less than a dollar, she counted out the pennies and paid. Having spent her money, she continued to whine for other things “she needed”. Mom said, “We will need to just leave it you can’t quit asking for things.” She begged not to leave, so browsing continued. A short time later, she asked for another special item she had seen and loudly insisted she have it. This time Dad tried to get her quiet but had lost patience. “You’re mean!” she screamed. She gave a glaring stare and mumbled “You don’t love me”. Dad took her hand and led her to the car. When she got home, the dollar toys was left in the car, forgotten.*

Parents can respond with kind but firm respect, giving limited choices, setting reasonable limits, encouraging, and redirecting the child to a more acceptable activity. When children test their limits and use a public display to assert themselves, parents can continue to stick to the basic rules, letting children know their behavior is unacceptable. Leave the situation if possible (a store or home in which you are a guest). Talk when things are calmer at a later time.

**Revenge** - when children believe they belong only by hurting others, because they feel hurt themselves.

*Larry had been whining when Mom left him each morning with the child care provider. That evening, Dad was cooking dinner while Mom worked late. Suddenly Logan screamed. Dad threw down the potato peeler and ran to see what the problem was.*
Larry had pinned Logan in a wrestling position and was twisting his ear. Dad hollered to Larry, saying “Why can’t you leave your brother alone? Go to your room and wait for me!”

Sometimes the reason for misbehavior is not clear. When there is a new pattern of acting out, children and parents should talk about how they are feeling. Parents can respond by avoiding harsh punishment and criticism, building trust, listening, reflecting feelings, practicing sharing of feelings, encouraging strengths and acting with care.

**Inadequacy** – when children believe they belong only when they convince others not to expect anything of them because they feel helpless or unable.

Jorge’s teacher asked his parents what might be affecting Jorge’s work at school. His teacher says, “He doesn’t complete assignments and no matter how much I help him, he gets further behind.” Mom replied, “He doesn’t do anything at home either. I have quit asking him to do any chores at home because when he does them, he is so sloppy and does it so badly, I have to do it again.”

Parents can respond by encouraging their children to try things, focusing on the child’s strengths, not criticizing or giving in to pity, offering opportunities for success and teaching skills in small steps.

*Source: Karen DeBord, Ph. D.; Child Development Specialist with North Carolina State University*

**FUN THINGS TO DO WITH YOUR CHILDREN**

- Make pinecone bird feeders to feed the birds during the cold winter months.

- Bake some bread or tour a bakery.

- Make a dream catcher. Learn about the legend of the dream catcher at www.dream-catchers.org

- With the fall harvest upon us, have kids keep track of how many servings of fruits and vegetables they eat every day for one week. Are they achieving the “5 A Day Challenge”?

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