

## "CHERISHED MOMENTS" COLUMN

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### "CHERISHED MOMENTS"

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.

*“ The best inheritance a person can give to his children  
is a few minutes of his time each day. “*

-- O.A. Battista

### Developmental Milestones

Children usually grow up in some form of family, surrounded by a variety of people who try to provide a warm and secure environment. Understanding how children develop will help parents and other caregivers know what to expect. Although different areas of development (intellectual, physical, social, and moral) should be considered, the goal is to treat a child as a whole person who needs to develop in all areas.

#### **The First Two Years**

From birth to about age 2, infants need to build close relationships with their parents or other important people around them. These attachments make it possible for infants to build a sense of loving and caring. They are learning to make sense out of permanent objects and developing a sense of trust. Only as children experiment through touching, dropping, pulling, and pushing do they begin to learn.

During this time, children do not believe that things exist unless they can see them. This is why it is so difficult for them to be away from their parents. To feel close to someone, infants need to be able to count on having their needs met in a timely manner. Gaining a sense of trust is the first stage of their emotional development.

#### **The Preschool Years**

These years are the most significant in a person's life. Language and social skills are developed. Children at this age also learn symbols. For example, they learn to see a picture of a ball and recognize that the picture represents a real ball. Recognizing symbols is an important step toward developing important skills such as the ability to read.

Toddling, exploring, and pounding may worry parents, but they are normal behaviors. When children touch, feel, look, mix, turn over, and throw, they are developing skills. Exploration is

intellectually healthy and helps children test their independence. Although these behaviors create a struggle between child and parent, they should be expected. Plan for them.

Independence is an emotion to be encouraged during the preschool years. The alternative is shame and doubt. Many significant events occur during these years (between 2 and 3, toilet training and language in particular). In responding to a child's misuse of language or accidents when toileting, parents and caregivers should be sensitive to avoid using guilt and punishments for what are most likely normal acts of development.

Once children learn to handle independence, they are ready to develop a healthy sense of initiative. Initiative means starting activities, creating, and working. Children who learn to start their own activities lay the groundwork for positive and productive school experiences. Again, explorations, questions, and investigation play major roles in development.

### **Middle Childhood**

From the time they begin school until around age 12, children are in middle childhood, when learning skills becomes better defined. Children at this stage have high-order thinking skills and can use them to make more complex decisions. As children they have always believed what adults say as basically true, but they now begin to question the pedestal upon which they have placed adults.

Rules become more significant, and children learn not only rules for games, but rules that will help them understand math concepts and social rules, such as saying "please" and "thank you." Rules make formal education possible.

Closely on the heels of developing a sense of initiative in the preschool years is the development of sense of industry. Groundwork is laid during middle childhood for becoming productive members of society or for children to feel inferior/inadequate. Adults should seek to build a sense of confidence that children in middle childhood can do jobs well. Many children have their sense of industry undermined by well-meaning parents and teachers who mistakenly try to use criticism to motivate them.

### **Strategies for the Adults in a Child's Life**

Children spend their young years trying to figure out how they fit into the world. How independent or dependent will they be allowed to be? What will be the consequences of various actions? Who will give them direction? Who will be their role models? In addition to the reasons for behaviors, parents must determine if they have provided a stable, loving, understanding place to help children learn and grow. Consider these questions.

**Are expectations for the child clear?** Children develop at different rates, have different interests, and certainly have different kinds of homes and families. Are attempts made to prepare the child for new situations? Offer explanations on what the occasion is about and what behavior will be expected so guessing isn't necessary. To prevent reactions, use continuous two-way communication and allow the child a certain amount of responsibility in setting his or her own rules or limits.

**Is the behavior driven by the child's need to test the boundaries of particular relationships?** Children who realize that the adult will “still love them” if they are “bad” feel secure. They may test boundaries to make sure they are loved, and this may be particularly true when there have been many changes in the family home.

**Are consistent limits understood and followed?** Children may resist limits if there is too much adult control and not enough room allowed for making their own choices. Discipline allows children to develop their own “inner voice,” which will sensibly guide their behavior as they grow. Often adults must be careful that they, too, follow the rules they make for children. Consistency plays a major role in parenting.

**Are there good role models for the children to copy?** Children who are exposed only to the role models on television or video games will quickly learn that the behaviors they see on TV or in games are what is acceptable. Spending time with children in various settings helps them to learn ways to act. Take them out to eat with friends, and expose them to good manners. Take them to the store with you and show them how to talk with a store checkout clerk. Show them how to say “thank you” and “please” or to shake hands with an adult they meet. Above all, help them to understand how to resolve problems.

Being a parent is difficult; children want and need connections with parents. Time consuming? Yes! But investing in connecting with your young child will prove valuable as the child grows into a teenager. Be there for your child. Give your child choices so they learn to think for themselves. Limit television. Spend time together taking a walk, reading together, making things, riding bikes, or talking. Then you may find that it's not really discipline that they need so much as loving guidance and to learn from your best example.

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

### **FUN THINGS TO DO WITH YOUR CHILDREN**

- Make pumpkin cupcakes.
- Serve spiced apple cider.
- Louisa May Alcott, C.S. Lewis, and Mark Twain were all born in the month of November. Read books by these authors.
- Take a walk to observe the changes in the season.

For more information contact the Scotland County Center of the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service at 277-2422. Employment and program opportunities are available to all people regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability. In addition, North Carolina State University welcomes all persons without regard to sexual orientation.