"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.

"The most important thing that parents can teach their children is how to get along without them."
-- Frank A. Clark, Author

**Emotional Coaching**

Emotions are a huge part of what makes setting limits for children so difficult. Learning how to manage complex feelings is one of the hardest things for children and adults to master. However, when there is an outpouring of emotions—whether it is a bout of happiness, a crying tantrum, or a violent outburst, parents and other adults can help children learn to deal with their emotions.

John Gottman calls this being an *emotion coach*. This is a five-step process that parents can learn:

1. **Recognize the emotion.** Become aware of your child’s moods and learn to recognize his/her cues for various emotions. Begin to view any display of emotion as a time to connect with children, teach them, and help them grow. Listen to your child, and help him/her find words to describe the emotions at hand. Remember that children learn how handle their emotions by watching adults handle theirs.

2. **Build connections.** To sustain a healthy relationship with your child throughout life means connecting in good time and bad. So often parents soothe displays of emotion with food, disregarding and ignoring the emotion. Or they suggest that the emotion is wrong. Instead of feeling uncomfortable with emotional displays, listen to the child and name the emotion. Then try to connect by encouraging the child to talk about the feeling. These are wonderful teaching times, and sharing in the moment makes the child feel supported and understood.

3. **Listen empathetically.** Children are seeking comfort and understanding. When you listen, they learn that you care about what they think and feel. Reflect back what you hear the child saying. “It sounds as if your feelings are hurt,” or “So you felt left out,” or “It sounds as if there is something at school you are not looking forward to.” Above all,
don’t dismiss a child’s feelings as silly. They are important to the child. Don’t judge or criticize a show of emotions as childish or unnecessary. Take the child seriously, then move to the next steps: label the emotion and begin to talk about how to handle the situation that caused it.

4. **Label the emotion.** Finding the best word to describe the emotion can sometimes be difficult. However, helping a child name an emotion seems to actually soothe the child. Realize that sometimes two conflicting feelings occur at once. Try not to tell children how they should feel. When you experience a display of emotions in front of your children, name your feelings so your children will get practice at labeling theirs.

5. **Set limits and problem-solve.** Just letting the emotions be shown and naming them is only part of the process. The real learning occurs when parents can go to the next step, which results in children who are more confident problem solvers. This starts by first setting limits to help children know when a line is crossed. For example, explain that it is not okay to hit your brother, break toys, and slam a wall because of anger. Learning acceptable ways to express emotions is the first part, but seeking solutions is the critical learning piece. Often creativity is needed to help the child brainstorm with ideas for solving issues. Give the child time to come up with ideas for handling difficult feelings, then discuss the pros and cons of each idea. This helps the child own the solution and grow in his/her ability to solve problems.

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

**FUN THINGS TO DO WITH YOUR CHILDREN**

- Have a family discussion. Everyone names 5 things which makes them thankful.


- Prepare a special skit or songs to perform for the guests at a holiday celebration.

- Write letters of thanks to veteran family members and/or friends in celebration of Veteran’s Day.

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