



Starting Strong Connection

Surviving the Holiday Season with Young Children



Do you ever feel like the perfect, magical holidays sold to us in commercials are nothing but a peppermint fantasy? I remember one Christmas when my children were small and they begged me to help them make and decorate sugar cookies. I had this vision of us making and decorating sugar cookies and having a blissful holiday experience. I gathered the ingredients and a variety of items to decorate the cookies. The kids were excited at first and had fun decorating *one* cookie each, leaving me in the kitchen to finish baking and decorating dozens of cookies *by myself*, on top of a long list of things I felt I had to accomplish.

If there is any time of year capable of leaving parents reeling and gasping for air, it is the holidays. Between work, school, school activities, tree-trimming, shopping, cooking, eating and generally just working one's self to the bone!

As difficult as the time between Halloween and New Years is for us we sometimes forget how difficult some of these activities can be for our children. How many of us are guilty of trying to bribe our children for good behavior, repeatedly reminding them that Santa is watching only to eventually find ourselves stressed to the point of losing our cool.

Whether you are taking a long trip in the car, shopping at the mall, sitting at a restaurant or at a family gathering (holiday

season or not) here are a few tips that might help both you and your kids survive.

Think ahead: Take a few minutes to think about past holidays and consider the following when planning for upcoming seasonal gatherings or trips.

- Where or when might your kids have a difficult time during holiday event or activity?
- What is most challenging for them?
- What might help them manage their behavior better?

Prepare: Consider packing a small bag or backpack with items to keep kids busy. Things like stickers, paper, pencils, crayons, small activity books and short books they can "read". Take your children's personality and age into consideration when choosing items. You may also want to include things liked bottled water and small packages of healthy snacks so kids aren't tempted to overindulge in sodas and sweets. As much as possible, include children in planning and let them help prepare for Holiday events.

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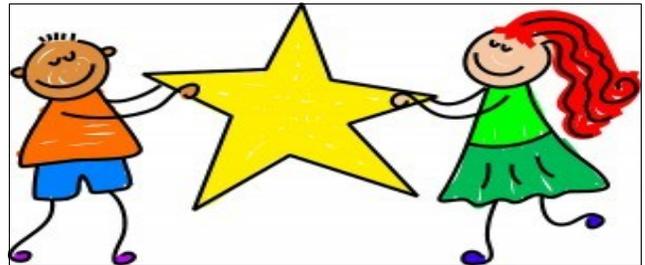
The Journey of Mixed Emotions- Teachable Moments: How to Help Your Child Avoid Meltdowns



When this timer is done, come tap me on my leg and show me the timer."

Does this sound familiar? Your children are playing in the living room while you clean up the kitchen. The phone rings and you answer, and within a few minutes one child is angry and screaming because someone took a toy and the other is in tears because her sister hit her. It is in escalated moments like this that parents often find themselves trying to teach rules or give long explanations. Unfortunately, in moments like this, your child usually is not even hearing your words let alone learning the rule. This is not a teachable moment. There are countless teachable moments daily when skills can be taught and emotions discussed, such as during play time, in the car, at bath time or while reading together. As parent, you can reduce challenging behaviors such as hitting, biting, pushing and whining when you 1) concentrate on calming your child during a challenging behavior incident and 2) wait until an appropriate teachable moment to actually teach your child. Following are some examples of teachable moments that you can use throughout the day to reduce the chance that the challenging behavior occurs in the first place.

- **Teachable Moment #1**-Read the book *Hands Are Not for Hitting* by Marine Agassi.
- **Teachable Moment #2**- During breakfast time, intentionally teach the skill of sharing by saying, "Thank you for sharing the syrup with your sister!"
- **Teachable Moment #3**- When your children are playing on the floor quietly, sit on the floor, make eye contact and say, "Wow, you girls have been playing for 10 minutes quietly! Tell me about what you are doing." This teaches the desired behavior of playing quietly together.
- **Teachable Moment #4**-When the phone rings. Put the phone down, get both children's attention and say, "I am going to be on the phone for 10 minutes.



Try This at Home

Find teachable moments throughout the day!

- **Play Time** (responding to common challenging behavior): "Oh, no! I see that your bunny is super sad. Her sister is trying to take her toy. I wonder what she can do?" You can teach appropriate ways of getting her needs met.
- **Bath Time** (teaching rules): "The water stays in the tub. You can use the cup and pour water into another cup or you can pour water on your body."
- **Story Time** (teaching emotions): "Wow, that little girl in this book is really angry! I saw that she asked her mom for a hug. That is a great way to feel better. I wonder what you can do when you feel angry?"
- **Meal Time** (teaching expectations): "Let's practice asking for more milk." Role play with whining, yelling or just banging your cup. Then, teach the expected behavior. "you can ask nicely, say, "Mommy, milk please." When she does this, jump up and say, "I am happy to get you milk."

Adapted from Backpack Connection Series created by TACSEI

The Bottom Line

Young children are learning in every moment. They are actively discovering the world around them. You are always teaching your child. Strolling in the park, reading books and giving her a kiss before bed all teach her about her world. You can use the many calm and happy moments in your day to intentionally teach expectations, rules and skills that will help your child be successful and reduce challenging behavior.

Growing Up Wild: Who Lives in a Tree?

Help your child count the trees in your neighborhood or yard. How many kinds of trees do you see? Are there any squirrels living there? What about birds or other animals? What are they doing? Help your child learn about the natural world around them. Share information about trees. A tree is "home" for many different animals. Some, such as beetles, ants, worms, and spiders, may spend their entire lives in and around a single tree.

Others such as squirrels, raccoons, opossums, or frogs may use one tree as a home base shelter, but venture afield for water, food, or mates. Still others, like birds, bees, or bats, may use a given tree only for a resting spot, temporary shelter, or to eat a meal. Trees provide food and shelter in many ways. Various animals may eat a tree's fruits, seeds, buds, flowers, leaves, bark and even its roots. Like many animals, people also rely on trees for both food and shelter. Fruits such as apples, pears, peaches and cherries come from trees, as do nuts such as walnuts, hazlenuts, and pine nuts. Although most people don't actually live in trees, many of us live in wooden houses made from trees.

Build -A-Nest: Help your child make their own bird nests

using brown paper lunch sacks, mud, and a variety of nesting materials (yarn, leaves, grass, scraps of paper or fabric, sticks, dryer lint, and so on) Gather up mud or dirt outside and add water. Cut one-third off the top of each sack and roll down the sides to create a bowl shape. Show children how to cover the bag with a layer of mud, both inside and out. Encourage your child to pack the nesting materials into the mud in any way they choose.

From Growing Up WILD: Exploring Nature with Young Children/Game Fish and Parks



Corner

Letter Trees (Reading)

Materials:

- Construction Paper
- Magazines/Newspapers/pre-printed letters of alphabet
- Glue
- Scissors
- Crayons/markers

Directions:

1. Draw a tree with branches on the construction paper
2. Have kids find the letters of their name or just the first letter of their name in magazines, etc.
3. Cut out the letters and glue them onto their tree
4. Look at and talk about the way the same letter looks different — capitals and lowercase, different typeface and font, etc.

(From The Big Book of Pre-K Learning Centers by Diane C. Ohanesian)



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Children who start early,
Start Strong.



Surviving Holidays (Continued from page 1)

Talk to them about what to expect so they won't be caught off guard. Let them know important details (when, where, and who) and what you expect of them during the celebration, occasion or activity. Consider delegating a task or job they can do to help out.

Catch them being good: During activities make sure you let your kids know when they are doing a good job of behaving. Try to give them kudos throughout, instead of waiting until the end.

Give breaks as needed: If your child seems a little overwhelmed or on the verge of having problems give them a break by removing them from the situation. Try taking a short walk, get some fresh air outside or engage in a quiet conversation that helps them redirect their attention. And remember to give yourself a break too!

Happy Holidays!

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