

## **Remember to Connect**

By Eleanor Reynolds

I do a great deal of walking, mostly on a local lakeside trail, alone or while pushing my grandchild's stroller. I have recently been struck by the number of parents who are also pushing strollers while engaged in lengthy conversations on their cell phones. This is so common that, several days ago, I observed a mother pushing a stroller and actually talking to her child; it made me want to run up and give her a hug! Why do so many parents seem to ignore their children and pass up the opportunity to interact with them, engage them in conversation, and teach them about their surroundings? Why do they choose cell phone contact over eye contact with their child?

All parents want to provide their child the best possible education. Most people think of early childhood education as the function of preschool. Indeed, a school setting can impart social skills, but going for a walk with your child can be another kind of learning experience. You might just be trying to get exercise or fresh air, but your child is taking in the environment with all of her senses. She is seeing stimulation sights, which may include people, houses, dogs, trees, weeds growing out of the sidewalk, ducks floating by, birds and planes overhead, lights, flowers in yards, sunshine, falling rain, or snow - just to name a few. Your child is hearing and smelling these things and much more. She needs someone with whom she can share these new sensations and who can give names to them. She needs someone to validate and appreciate her newly discovered world. She needs to learn joy

and gratitude, emotions that will make her strong and stay with her for life.

It may be tempting to use the walk with your child as a time to catch up on phone calls and take care of some business, but next time, try turning off your phone and focusing on your child. Point out the sights, sounds, and smells in your surroundings and, in a simple way, explain what they mean. Add the sense of touch by slowing down enough to allow him to touch a flower or leaf, or if he can walk, let him out of the stroller so he can discover those "touchables" by himself. You might be rewarded by a look of wonder, a puzzled stare, or a burst of exuberance as your child experiences the newness and complexity of her world. To a young child, the world is a magical and fascinating place; even its most mundane elements are exciting!

Paying attention certainly applies to your time in the car as well. Safety issues aside, there is a wealth of learning to be done in the car. Child safety seats place the young child high enough to see out of a window. Imagine what your child thinks when a tractor-trailer glides by the window carrying a load of new automobiles or a smelly garbage truck rattles by. There are traffic lights to see, fire trucks, ambulances, and police cars with blaring sirens and flashing lights, motorcycles roaring and bikes whizzing past. Time in the car is also a good time to sing songs together or turn some classical music on the radio or CD player and sing along. Consider this a bonus of time that you can spend with your child.

What is the benefit of turning off your cell phone and focusing on your child? The result of positive, sharing, parent-child communication is the strengthening of the relationship. Your child will know that he comes first with you. This provides him with security and self-reliance. You are also performing the act of teaching. You are the focus of your child's mind and heart and his window to the world. As you introduce, describe and explain his world, you are enriching his life and enhancing the natural learning process. You are your child's first teacher. The memories you create with your child are worth far more than the phone calls you might miss!

Eleanor Reynolds is the editor of *The Best of the Problem-Solver: Articles for Parents and Teachers* and the author of *Guiding Young Children: A Problem-Solving Approach*. She can be reached by email at [problem@blarg.com](mailto:problem@blarg.com).

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#### **The Role of the Caring Provider**

May 20, 2006 at 9am-11am  
Child Care Services Meeting Room  
600 A Street, Davis, 95616

Taking a look at the role of the caregiver: caring for children, caring for yourself and partnering with parents.

#### **Safety as They Grow**

May 23, 2006 at 6:30am-8:30pm  
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Discussing the issues regarding child safety, explore ways to create safe environments, and how to respond to emergencies.

#### **Health & Nutrition as They Grow**

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An overview of important issues regarding health & nutrition. Learn some strategies for providing a healthy caring environment and how to teach children good habits.