OHIO DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES

Frontlinefocus

EAP OHIO EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

DECEMBER 2015 | HELPING AND SUPPORTING YOU TO LIVE WELL AND SERVE WELL...

How Can I Raise a Moral Child?

What is morality? How can we raise our children to be empathic, caring and moral people? Moral behavior means different things to different people. Let's say that morality means treating ourselves and others with respect. Empathy, compassion and a sense of justice are central components of this kind of moral behavior.

Morality is Learned

Babies are born neither intrinsically good nor intrinsically bad. Children learn behaviors and values from their environment – mainly from their parents, but also from siblings, other relatives, peers, teachers and increasingly, the media. Children learn from watching how other people behave, from having conversations with adults about behavior, and from their own experience.

The moral behavior of young children may first be motivated by wanting to please beloved adults, or by concerns and fears about punishment. As children grow and develop, they begin to internalize external moral values as their own. However, children all grow and develop at different rates and the ages assigned to the following stages of moral development are approximate.

Moral Milestones by Age

0-2 Years

- Infants and toddlers are essentially pre-moral. They can't see beyond their own needs. It's unreasonable to expect a child under two to voluntarily share a toy or for an infant to understand that you have had a hard day.
- However you can facilitate your baby's sense of compassion and empathy by treating her with kindness, by helping her identify emotions and (for toddlers) by setting limits on acts of physical aggression.

3-5 Years

- Preschoolers are learning to be social creatures. With the help of caring adults, your preschooler is capable of learning to share, to refrain from hitting even when angry and to have a developing sense of right and wrong about how people should be treated.
- It's very hard for kids this age to see someone else's point of view. Their ability to control themselves – to not become overwhelmed by emotion or desire – is tenuous. Your preschooler needs lots of love, positive reinforcement and consistent limit-setting around behaviors.

6-10 Years

- Grade-schoolers have a strong sense of justice. Each year, they gain more self-control. During this period, your child develops a greater sense of empathy and compassion.
- By age eight, he should be able to really understand what it feels like to be hurt. However, his need to belong and the influence of his peers may cause him to do things he actually knows are wrong.
- Grade-schoolers need help taking responsibility for their actions and learning that actions have consequences. Children change a lot during this time: A 6-year-old might not understand the finality of death, but a 10-year-old should have a good sense of what it means.

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11-15 Years

- As hormones kick in, children tend to be strongly influenced by emotions. Even more than their younger siblings, young adolescents need to belong. The influence of their peers can have an overwhelming influence on their behavior.
- This is a time for kids to start experimenting with different behaviors and rebellion against parental authority. Although your child might chafe against it, she needs consistent, compassionate limit-setting and strong parental guidance more than ever.
- Adolescents become capable of thinking about more complex moral issues, such as the death penalty and the extremes of wealth and poverty.

16-18 Years

- Older teenagers are more sophisticated than younger ones, but they're still not adults. By now, they should have a clear sense of right and wrong, and a sense of responsibility for their actions. However, they still are susceptible to peer pressure, a false sense of being invulnerable and a need to rebel against authority, which may lead to minor infractions against the law. Your teenager still needs parental guidance and – more than ever – he needs to experience the consequences of his actions.

Practical Suggestions for Parents

- **Monitor your own behavior and values.** Do you treat other people with respect? Are empathy, compassion and justice important to you?
- **Take an honest look at how you solve conflicts, both at home and at work.** Are you open-minded? A good listener? Do you search for fair solutions to conflicts, or is winning and being right the most important thing? Do you yell, use violence or aggression, or coerce people with intimidation or guilt? If you resort to using violence or humiliation as a way of keeping order in your own family, your children may begin to use those same techniques in their peer relationships.
- **From infancy, talk with your children about feelings.** Give them words to identify emotions: "I know you're angry that you can't watch television right now." "It's sad that Michael can't come to your birthday party." Help your children understand that feelings are different than actions. It's okay for them to feel whatever they're feeling; what matters is how they act. Boys, especially, need to learn that having feelings is normal and even positive. All children need help learning to express anger without physically or psychologically wounding other people: "It's okay to be angry at Sean for knocking down your blocks, but you can't hit him. Can you tell him that you're angry?"
- **Show compassion for your child's feelings, even when they differ from your own.** Let your child know from an early age that you respect her feelings: "I know you're angry that I won't let you sleep over at Ellen's, but I think you need to be home tonight." "I know you're angry that I won't let you go to Emma's party, but her parents aren't going to be there and I don't think it will be safe."

- **Talk with your child about how his behavior affects other people:** "I think Alyssa was sad when you wouldn't give her a turn to play." "Eric was so happy when you shared your candy with him." Encourage your child to remember how he felt in a similar situation, or to think about how he would feel under similar circumstances. "Sam's feelings are hurt when you call him names. Remember how you felt when he called you names?" "How would you feel if everyone teased you about how you look?"
- **From an early age, your child needs help finding alternatives to violence for resolving conflict:** "It's okay to be angry at Josh, but you can't hit him. Let's find some other ways to settle this argument." Help her see that getting angry is okay and doesn't have to be catastrophic. "No wonder you're angry. Ellen treated you really badly. But you've been friends for such a long time. Can you tell her how you feel?"

Parents Aren't the Only Influence

As a parent you have an enormous influence on your

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child's values and behavior, but we mustn't underestimate the influence of peers and the media as well.

Excessive exposure to violence or disrespectful behavior can affect the way children resolve conflicts or treat others. The media can affect children's behavior directly, but it also influences kids indirectly through their peers' exposure to it.

Having an Ongoing Conversation

When your children are very young, get in the habit of talking with them about justice and other moral issues. Talk with them about violence and your feelings about it. By keeping the lines of communication open as they grow, you're providing your children with an invaluable opportunity to explore their own ideas about morality and to reinforce the values that are important to you and your family.

Life is full of moral decisions and quandaries. There are opportunities to talk about your family ethics and morality with your children everywhere. Use news stories, movies, TV shows, books and daily life events as a platform for talking about moral issues.

Encourage your children, even at an early age, to express their own opinions, to think about what they might do and say in various situations and to try to put themselves in the shoes of victims of injustice.

By Dr. Susan Linn, Associate Director of the Media Center for Children at the Harvard University-affiliated Judge Baker Children's Center. © Dr. Susan Linn. Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved.

How You Can Help Your Child Learn to Be a Good Self Advocate

It is never too early to start teaching your child how he or she can advocate for himself or herself. Like many other important life skills, self-advocacy is a critical tool your child needs to achieve goals, increase self-sufficiency and become a successful young adult. It is a lifelong process that begins with your child learning by watching you, as a parent, be a good advocate.

What Exactly does Self-Advocacy Mean?

Self-advocacy means taking the responsibility for communicating your needs and desires in a straightforward manner to others. It is a set of skills that includes:

- Speaking up for yourself;
- Communicating your strengths, needs and wishes;
- Being able to listen to the opinions of others, even when their opinions differ from yours;
- Having a sense of self-respect;
- Taking responsibility for yourself;
- Knowing your rights; and
- Knowing where to get help or who to go to with a question.

One of the best places to start teaching your child about self-advocacy is in his or her Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings. Including your son or daughter in the IEP meeting provides him or her with an opportunity to learn and practice important life skills. Some advantages your child may gain by being involved in the IEP process include:

- Learning about the impact of his or her disability;
- Practicing goal setting;
- Building teamwork skills;
- Developing an ability to speak up for himself or herself;
- Participating in a process of resolving differences;
- Gaining an understanding of his or her strengths and needs; and
- Learning how to ask for and accept help from others.

Even very young children can contribute to their IEP meetings. If you feel your child is too young to participate in the entire meeting, you may choose to include him or

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her just in the opening of the meeting. This helps your child to know the IEP team members better and to start to be more comfortable in a meeting setting. It also ensures that everyone at the meeting starts out with your child as the focus. If your child does not attend the IEP meeting, you can bring a picture of your child to display at the meeting. You also can receive your child's input before you attend the IEP meeting. Ask your child if there is anything he or she would like to share at the meeting or to have you share. It also can be very beneficial to ask each team member to state one positive trait or skill your child has as you begin the meeting. Be sure to include your child in this sharing of positives. After the IEP meeting, sit down with your child and explain the goals and services or answer any questions your child may have.

As your child becomes older, the ways in which he or she can participate in his or her IEP meetings greatly increases. It is important to discuss the meeting process with your child beforehand. Role-playing being in an IEP meeting with your child can be a great teaching tool and may help your child to feel less anxious about participating.

Ways for your child to be involved include, but are not limited to:

- Writing down ideas, questions and concerns before the IEP meeting;
- Rehearsing what he or she wants to say in the IEP meeting;
- Introducing himself or herself;
- Talking about his or her interests, strengths and desires for the future;
- Explaining his or her disability to the team;
- Leading all or part of the IEP meeting;
- Helping the team develop IEP goal areas;
- Asking for explanations if he or she doesn't understand something; and
- Reviewing what the team has agreed to at the end of the meeting.

Some questions you may want to discuss with your son or daughter prior to the IEP meeting are:

- What do you want to learn or work on this year?
- What are your special concerns for the school year?
- How do you learn the best?
- What do you need to be successful?
- What would make learning easier for you?
- What do you wish your teacher and other school staff would understand about you?

Discuss with your child how to handle the situation if something negative or difficult to hear is said about him or her in the meeting. Determine at what point, if any, you would stop the meeting and have your child leave. If the meeting is likely to be too stressful or negative, have your child only attend part of it and determine the agenda ahead of time with the team. Be sure to include your child's input on the agenda. If your child chooses not to attend a meeting, ask if he or she would be willing to share ideas or opinions in writing or on tape to provide to the team.

Federal special education law (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) requires your child to be invited to the IEP meetings anytime transition services or needs are to be discussed. Transition is about planning for your child's future and taking a look at his or her skills in the five areas of employment, post-secondary education, home living, community participation and recreation/leisure.

Teaching your child self-advocacy skills will benefit him or her throughout the school years and far beyond into adulthood. Knowing and exercising your rights as a parent are the first steps in teaching your child to become a strong self-advocate.

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Dr. Joseph Hullett, national medical director of Optum Behavioral Solutions, discussed innovations in treatment and recovery and led an open forum about how treatment and recovery is working to empower and improve lives, including the lives of some of our state employees.

Pictured: Speakers at the 2015 OEAP Annual Resource Conference included (from left) Mark Hurst, M.D., medical director of the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS); Andrea Boxill, deputy director of OhioMHAS; and Sarah Smith, director of Start Talking (OhioMHAS). (Photos by Eric Hagely).

By Eric Hagely, Ohio Department of Administrative Services.

2015 OEAP Annual Resource Conference: A Look Back

OEAP Conference Brings Awareness to Substance Abuse

Did you know that the national cost of substance abuse disorders is estimated at $600 billion annually? That's billion with a "B." That cost is related to crime, lost work productivity and health care expenditures. The Ohio Employee Assistance Program (OEAP) took the issue of substance abuse head-on in mid-September during its annual conference titled, "Understanding Substance Abuse: Current Trends in Treatment and Recovery."

All too frequently, news stories shed light on the drug epidemic, drugs in schools or the latest street drugs. Presenters brought awareness to these issues and discussed ways state employees who are dealing with these very real problems can be supported.

Dr. Mark Hurst, medical director of the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS), presented addiction as a chronic disease with biological, psychological and social components. He shared that positive outcomes are possible when addiction is treated in a person-centered, comprehensive and compassionate manner.

Andrea Boxill and Sarah Smith, also of OhioMHAS, highlighted initiatives regarding drug awareness and the Start Talking program, which give parents, guardians, educators and community leaders the tools to engage in conversations with Ohio youth about the importance of living healthy, drug-free lives.

EAP
OHIO EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Your employee assistance program offers confidential help for personal problems and concerns. Concerned about a troubled family member who won't get help? Feel tired and exhausted, but don't know if it's burnout, loss of motivation, depression or all three? Late for work too often? Has the use of alcohol or drugs created a crisis you are facing right now? The bottom line, never wonder if your concern is appropriate to contact OEAP. So, if you've been putting off taking action to solve a serious issue that is weighing on you, give OEAP a call today.

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