

JANUARY

INTEGRITY

DEFINITION

We say and do the right thing, even when no one is watching.

MODELING INTEGRITY

- Make sure your kids see you doing the right thing even when no one would know if you did the wrong thing. Some examples:
 - You've left a store and are in the parking lot when you realize a large item on the bottom of the cart was not rung up. Walk back in and let the employee know...with your kids in tow.
 - You've been given too much change in a retail situation. Let your kids see you point it out and return the extra money.
 - In a restaurant, you've not been charged for one of the beverages or a side dish. Let the server know and make it right.
- Be on time – showing that you will be where you say you will be when you say you will be there is a great way of modeling integrity.
- Avoid white lies as much as you can. Children often can't distinguish between a white lie and an actual lie. Let them watch you be truthful, even when it is hard. Comment on it by saying, "it is hard for me to be honest with you right now, but I'm choosing to do so anyway because our family values integrity."
- Talk through scenarios as they happen by asking thoughtful questions. "What do you think we should do here?" "Why?"
- Keep your promises and honor your commitments, both to your children and to others. Comment on this when it is hard to do. "Even though it's hard, it's important to me that I keep my promise because we value integrity."

ACTIVITIES FOR INSTILLING INTEGRITY

- Play real-life scruples games with your children. Raise scenarios with them and ask what they would do. This provides a setting to talk about right responses and the reason for those responses. Deana mentions a game called "Moral, Immoral or Amoral" that accomplishes this on the [Decision-Making Episode of *Raising Adults*](#). Check it out! (Note: there may be some situations where there is more than one way to do the right thing!)
- Use situations you witness as opportunities for discussion. For instance, if you see someone speeding, you might talk about laws, why they exist and why we obey them even if a police officer isn't visible.
- Talk extensively about school situations, as this is where children spend a large segment of their day. Ask questions such as the following: What would they do if they were tempted to look at a fellow student's paper during a test? Or went to turn their paper in and saw the top test on the pile had a different answer than theirs...and it was right? How would they fight the urge to go back to their desk and amend their test? What if there's a rule against running in the hall, but you're alone heading to the restroom and no teachers are present? There are myriad opportunities for talks around integrity here.
- Encourage children to take responsibility for their actions. This may mean apologizing for an unkind word to a friend, making a card for a neighbor who felt left out during a game, or a short video on your phone to honor the impact a poor choice may have had on someone else.



QUOTE OF THE MONTH:

"Integrity is choosing courage over comfort; choosing what is right over what is fun, fast, or easy; and choosing to practice our values rather than simply professing them." - Brené Brown

SUGGESTED READING

A Hen FOR Izzy Pippik

WRITTEN BY Aubrey Davis
ILLUSTRATED BY Marie LaFrance



A Hen for Izzy Pippik

Written by Aubrey Davis

Illustrated by Marie LaFrance

When Shaina finds a magnificent hen, she knows that Izzy Pippik, the hen's owner, is sure to return for her. In the meantime, Shaina decides she will care for the animal. But when dozens of eggs hatch and rowdy chickens scatter throughout the village, Shaina must fight the entire town if she has any hope of protecting the birds. Inspired by Jewish and Islamic traditional texts, this is a beautiful tale about doing the right thing, even in the face of adversity.

PARENT DISCUSSION

- What does integrity mean to you as a family? How do you define it?
- What are the family values that you will be upholding when you live your life with integrity?
- How can we bring integrity to the forefront in our home in practical ways? In what ways are we already demonstrating this?
- How do we ensure our children learn integrity from others who may influence them? (This may mean hard discussions about choices of schools, extra-curricular activities and more!)
- Are there areas our children may have seen us conducting ourselves with a lack of integrity? What might we need to do to make that right?



FEBRUARY

GENEROSITY

DEFINITION

We give of our time, talent and resources to those who need us.

MODELING GENEROSITY

- Talk openly about the ways in which you give, whether that be giving a portion of your money to a cause you care about, making donations to those in need, or serving at a local shelter, soup kitchen or food bank. Allow your children to see you participate in these activities where possible.
- Make a “Give” jar that your children can fill with coins to donate to a charitable cause.
- Buy coffee for a homeless person.
- Offer to share with your children, whether it be a bite of food, a book you’re looking at, clothes you are done with that they might like for dress up, etc. The options are endless. Let them see you share with them and with the friends and family in your life.
- Every so often, when you go through a drive-thru restaurant or coffee shop, offer to pay for the car behind you. Talk with your children about random acts of kindness and giving.
- When going on a play date, bring some food for the host family to share.
- Offer to help where you see needs if you are able. Hold the door for someone, offer to assist an elderly person to their car with their groceries, etc.

ACTIVITIES FOR INSTILLING GENEROSITY

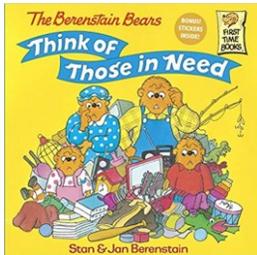
- When possible and appropriate, include your children in your serving and giving. As children participate in these activities over time, they will begin to develop a lifestyle of giving.
- When your children are done with clothes or toys, let them be part of donating them. Take your kids with you when you drop the items off and explain how giving at donation centers works.
- Bake cookies and make homemade cards and notes to deliver to a shelter, nursing home or police/fire station.
- Join a “Buy Nothing” group on Facebook and have your children participate in giving things to people within their community.
- As your children begin to earn money through allowance or other means, have them set aside a portion of their funds to give to those less fortunate. Let them help choose the charity or organization to which they would like the donation sent. (Note for older children/teenagers: this will often be met with reluctance by the teen who has a job and is starting to get paychecks or make more significant money. Parents will have to choose whether to require giving during this phase or simply step up their modeling, so the child has a positive example of giving and hopefully chooses to give on their own eventually.)
- Show generosity of spirit by remembering birthdays, anniversaries, etc. Make homemade cards, gifts or videos to send.



QUOTE OF THE MONTH:

“We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.” – Winston Churchill

SUGGESTED READING



The Berenstain Bears Think of Those in Need

by Stan Berenstain and Jan Berenstain

You can't go wrong with the Berenstain Bears. Mama Bear, especially, has always known just the right way to teach and guide her children. In this book, the Berenstain Bears realize they have too much stuff and decide to donate items to those in need. But they don't stop there, they also give of their time and energy to help others in the community.

PARENT DISCUSSION

- Do our children see us be generous with each other? (Generous here can mean sharing food/toys/clothes, etc. with family members, generosity with time by helping each other around the house or with homework, or even being generous with kind words and compliments.)
- Are there ways we can be more generous with our community, whether that is giving of our time or resources?
- Do we spend enough time encouraging generosity between siblings at home or on playdates/outings with friends? Are there ways we could improve on this?



MARCH KINDNESS

DEFINITION

the quality of being friendly, gentle, and considerate.

MODELING KINDNESS

- Aim to notice and comment on kindness around you in the world, or even in your own family. Sincere praise for a kind action goes a long way: “Wow! Thanks for the way you helped your brother up after he fell down and fetched a bandage. That was so kind of you, and we value kindness in our family, so thank you for demonstrating it.”
- Go out of your way to demonstrate consideration, whether that be offering your seat to someone in a crowded situation, clearing the plates of other family members after a meal, or helping someone with their hands full by offering to carry something or holding the door open.
- When shopping for the household, pick up a favorite treat for your children to show them a small kindness for no reason.
- Compliment and thank kind people in public so your children begin to recognize kind acts.
- Kind words count, too! Leave love notes in your child’s lunch box or dresser drawer for them to discover.
- Serve a neighbor by raking their leaves or shoveling snow.
- Bring a meal to a family who just had a baby or has a member recovering from surgery.

ACTIVITIES FOR INSTILLING KINDNESS

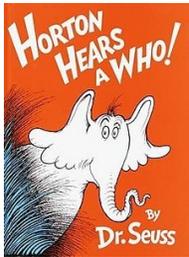
- Make a “kindness cart” (this can even be a small basket) to fill with things your children can give to a child who might need a small act of kindness or cheering up. When the need arises, the child can choose a couple of things from the basket to give. Items to consider might be small toys/gifts, art supplies, stickers, or bubbles. The basket can also house a supply of blank cards that can be written in and mailed to the person needing a pick-me-up.
- Challenge your child to be on the alert at school for kids getting picked on, eating alone at lunch, or being left out of games at recess and encourage them to extend kindness by inviting them to join their group of friends.
- Start a “pay it forward” chain. Do something nice for your child and encourage them to pass it on through a kind act for someone else.
- Let your child choose a kind activity on their birthday month and then implement it together. Struggling for ideas? Try offering to help an elderly person with their yard work, bringing some dog and cat food to the local animal shelter, or leaving a kind note/treat for your mail carrier.
- Paint a rock with a message of kindness and take it to your local park or place it in your neighborhood where people can see it, and let it bring a smile to their face.
- If you own a pet, teach about touching/handling the animal gently. If not, visit a shelter or petting zoo so your child can learn about kindness to animals as well.



QUOTE OF THE MONTH:

“No act of kindness, however small, is ever wasted.” - Aesop

SUGGESTED READING



Horton Hears a Who
by Dr. Seuss

In this classic children’s book, Horton the elephant hears the cries of a Who living on a speck and seeks to perform the ultimate act of kindness by making sure the Who community is not destroyed. Horton is a lovable protagonist who reminds us that everyone deserves kindness because “A person’s a person, no matter how small.” This book is helpful for sparking discussions about kindness and compassion.

PARENT DISCUSSION

- Talk through your kindness priorities. Where do you most hope to instill kindness and how? Do you want to ensure your kids are kind in their actions at school? Can you enlist the teachers or administration to hold an assembly about this? Or consider asking the teacher to occasionally update you on your own child’s behavior in this regard.
- Want to work on kind words in your home? Talk about how you can model kind speech as the adults, so it becomes contagious.



APRIL DILIGENCE

MODELING DILIGENCE

- Prioritize your own diligence by displaying a strong work ethic with your career or home tasks. Allow your children to see you choosing work, even at times it may not be desirable. For instance, demonstrate persistence by sticking with tasks when they are difficult, or display commitment by going to work even when extra tired. Feel free to comment on these things: "I sure am tired today after that late night helping your uncle move. But it's important that I still show up to work today." -OR- "Fixing the kitchen sink disposal is proving really challenging, but let's try something else. I'm sure if we keep working at it, we'll find a solution."
- Go out of your way to ensure tasks are done well and completely. If your children see you walking a can to the recycle container rather than lazily tossing it in the trash or making your bed neatly each morning instead of hastily pulling up the covers, they are watching diligence in action.
- Be ready to field questions about careful persistence on even the smallest tasks. For instance, if your children see you carefully filling out a medical form in your best handwriting, they may ask you why. You can be ready with a response such as, "It's important to always do my best work. If I rush on something small like this, I might end up also being careless with more important things, like driving! It's also a good idea to always write cleanly and neatly so that the person reading this can easily tell what I wrote. That's one way doing your best work at all times can even help others. You can keep this in mind for your own chores or homework, too."
- Compliment your children when you witness diligence. "I noticed you took the time to carefully load the dishwasher so that the bowls and glasses aren't on top of each other. Now they will get nice and clean. Thanks for your diligence."

DEFINITION

Careful, earnest, and persistent work or effort.

ACTIVITIES FOR INSTILLING DILIGENCE

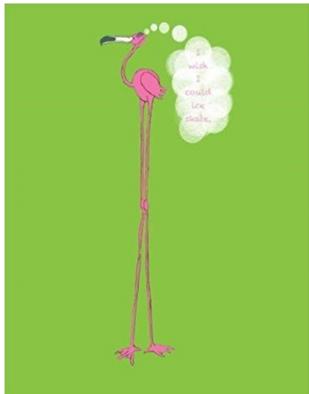
- Oversee chores around the house and don't be afraid to gently redirect when needed, or have your child repeat the task until it is done correctly and completely.
- Oversight is also helpful for homework. You often know even better than the teacher what your child is capable of, so don't hesitate to let your children know that you expect their best. It's ok to say, "I can't let you turn the assignment in looking like this. I know you can do better. Please erase this section and try again."
- If you have more than one child, turn diligence into a friendly competition. Set up different stations around the house with simple tasks. Points are awarded based not on who finishes first, but on who completes the tasks most carefully/properly.
- Allow opportunities to practice diligence, so when it's needed in a real situation, the habit is already instilled. Create "forms" for your kids to fill out using their best penmanship or let them practice a tidy bed-making job on their toy doll bed. Let them practice carefully folding kitchen towels so that when you teach them to fold laundry, they'll have a head start. As you've heard us say on the podcast, practice makes permanent!
- Reward diligence in practical ways. For example, you can let your child know they may have a night off from clearing the table to thank them for completing the task so well over the last several evenings. Or let your budding chef cook a simple meal or snack and let them know it's because you can trust them to carefully clean up when finished.



QUOTE OF THE MONTH:

“What we hope ever to do with ease, we must first learn to do with diligence.” – Samuel Johnson

SUGGESTED READING



I Wish I Could Ice Skate By Tony Pugliese

Although it seems an unlikely goal, Florence the Flamingo dreams of being able to ice skate. With lots of persistence, hard work, effort and determination, plus the support of her grandfather, she brings the dream to realization.

PARENT DISCUSSION

- Sometimes it can be hard to parent toward diligence when we are tired from all our own tasks. Talk through how you can team up (if part of a couple) to not grow lazy in this area. Maybe one of you can oversee homework, and the other can ensure chores are completed diligently. If you are a single parent, consider enlisting some help through a community tutoring service or a friend/relative that lives nearby and might be willing to lighten the load a few days per week.
- Discuss and/or make a list of areas where you could improve in your own diligence so that you're not inadvertently being a poor example. Have you been leaving dishes in the sink overnight? Failing to keep your own bed made or room tidy? Is there another aspect of your life where your children might not see diligence in action? Try setting a timer to see how long it takes to do your listed items completely and properly. You might be surprised at how small the time investment actually is! Commit to making the small sacrifice of time now for the long-term gain of raising diligent adults.



MAY

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

DEFINITION

the capacity to be aware of, control, and express one's emotions, and to handle interpersonal relationships judiciously and empathetically.

MODELING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

- One of the best ways to model EI is to use a wide range of feelings vocabulary. When you catch yourself smiling, tell your children, "boy, I'm feeling happy!" Or when you are frustrated or sad, name that feeling for them. When you finally manage to get that Amazon box ripped open you could say, "I'm feeling proud! I worked hard to open that." All of these words are ways of teaching your children that these various feelings are normal, and help them learn how to name their own feelings in future.
- Much like with empathy, you can model EI by vocally trying to figure out what other people might be feeling. For example, if you are checking out at the grocery store and have a particularly grumpy checker, you may choose to talk about this when you get to the car. "Did you notice that the checker seemed grumpy today? I wonder if they were feeling worried about something, or frustrated. What do you think?"
- Don't be afraid to feel your feelings. Children need to see us feel. They can be told over and over again that it's OK to cry, but if they never seen their own parents filled with emotion (happy or hard) then they are getting a mixed message. If you catch yourself tearful with your children remind them "I'm crying because I'm feeling sad. Sadness is a normal feeling - you can't get through life without feeling it!"

ACTIVITIES FOR INSTILLING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

- When watching tv or reading a book with your children, pause from time to time to ask them to use their "detective skills" to determine how the characters are feeling. Have them look at facial expressions, words, body language and tone of voice to figure it out.
- When children are feeling big feelings, name them. "It looks like you are feeling really frustrated!" For older children, ask them to name their feelings themselves. And...for children who deny their feelings (for example you say "It looks like you are feeling really angry right now" and they say "no I'm not!" you might ask them, "no? Then how ARE you feeling?"
- Separate behavior from feelings, especially when the behavior is less than ideal. You might say something like, "the fact that you are angry is totally fine. I'd be angry too if I were you. Hitting your brother is NOT an acceptable way of showing me you are angry, though. You may punch a pillow, or stomp your feet if you are feeling angry. Those feelings are OK, but this behavior is not."
- Create a feelings chart with your kids with different faces showing different feelings. Then hang it on the wall. When big feelings come up, ask your children to point to the face that matches how they feel. Then help them name the feeling.

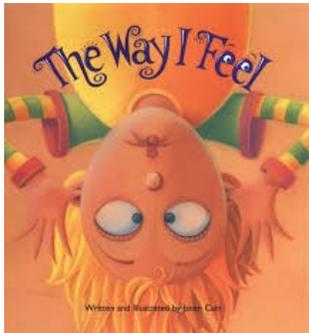


QUOTE OF THE MONTH:

“Emotions are not problems to be solved. They are signals to be interpreted.”

-Vironika Tugaleva

SUGGESTED READING



The Way I Feel By Janan Cain

Illustrations and rhyming text portray children experiencing a range of emotions, including frustration, shyness, jealousy, and pride.

PARENT DISCUSSION

- Consider areas where you may be confusing feelings and behavior. Ask yourselves how you can separate these things not only for your children, but for yourselves so that you can continue to allow the space for your kids to feel their feelings and process them in a healthy way.
- Get honest about whether or not you are modeling this well. Do your children often hear you say things like "it's so stupid I'm crying" or "I shouldn't feel this way"? Think of the areas where you might need to check your own comments so as to encourage a peaceful relationship between your child and their feelings.
- Think of your own family of origin and how your upbringing may be a help or a hindrance with regards to EI. Where are your blind spots? Where are your triggers? Oftentimes adults are triggered by a child's behavior that was shut down for the parent when they were small (for example, if you were not allowed to be sad, or often told not to cry, a child's weeping may be a big trigger for you and a blind spot you find yourself trying to shut down, thus continuing the cycle).



JUNE WISDOM

MODELING WISDOM

- It's critical that kids see adults in their world using information to make choices. Let's take a vacation example. You might say, "It's time to decide on our family vacation for this year, and we have lots to think about. It's nice going to the beach, but we did that last year, so perhaps we should do something different. The option for an amusement park trip is fun, but that really stretches our budget, so the trip may have to be shorter." Aspects such as whether to fly or drive, time of year, and family members' differing interests can all factor in as well.
- When your children face a decision, or even just a situation where they aren't sure what's right, invite a conversation about the scenario. Guide them through thinking about what information they already have about the situation. Then use that information, along with any relevant experience they might have, to lead them to the wisest outcome. Walking alongside them as they navigate these things is most helpful, and you will likely find yourself doing it well into the teen years! ("Your friend invited you to a party? That sounds fun, but you told me there might be alcohol there. What do you know about the party? Will there be adults there? Is there a chance you could get in trouble for the alcohol aspect even if you're not drinking? Will you be able to resist an offer to drink? Based on all of this, do you think you should attend? If so, what protections or parameters will you put in place to ensure you stick to your own decisions about drinking? What things might indicate to you that you should leave?")
- Wisdom also involves the appropriate hunger for knowledge. We only become wise by gaining information and life experience. Let your children see you be curious about the world around you, and model being a lifelong learner. This doesn't have to mean going back to school for an advanced degree; it can be as simple as admitting when you're stumped by a question and working to find the answer. Or you might finally take a class in a foreign language that interests you, learn a handicraft or study trivia. Growing in wisdom can be so much fun, and we want to model that love of learning for our children!

DEFINITION

The ability to use your experience and knowledge in order to make sensible decisions or judgments.

ACTIVITIES FOR INSTILLING WISDOM

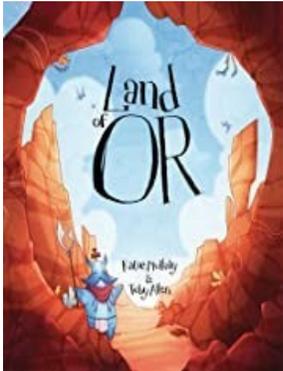
- Invent some tricky scenarios on road trips and have your children come up with the wisest decision for that conundrum. This will not only let children practice talking through different elements of the decision-making process, but helps the time pass, too! Your children also get the benefit of seeing that there's often more than one great way to handle something. You could even consider a small prize for the most creative and wise solution to the fictitious dilemma.
- Encourage your child to actively learn about things they are curious about. If they are interested in a certain animal, perhaps you can take them to the library to check out books about that animal, its habitat, life cycle and habits. Or if they love weather, watch the weather channel, go outside during a unique weather pattern, or create weather through hands-on projects (<http://www.weatherwizkids.com/weather-experiments.htm>). If they love science, consider visiting a science center in your area. A music lover? Sign up for lessons. The options are endless!
- Have a family game night and play a game such as Scruples or Would You Rather. These games put the "fun" in "functional decision-making." Enjoy the laughter while also pondering situations both real and silly!



QUOTE OF THE MONTH:

Science is organized knowledge; wisdom is organized life. – Immanuel Kant

SUGGESTED READING



Land of Or
by Katie Mullaly

This delightful book guides children into the land of Or where they learn to make fantastic decisions. They will encounter many characters along the way including their Guide, multiple Options and the mysterious Yabbut. As children explore the canyon of Why and cross the stream of If Then, they ultimately learn how to make the best decisions for themselves. For ages 5 and up.

PARENT DISCUSSION

- Be sure you discuss your own modeling of wisdom as the adults in the family. Do you make off the cuff decisions, or are you careful to think things through based on knowledge, common sense and experience? Do your children see you carefully and thoughtfully choosing what's best? If not, how can you improve upon this? If it's going well, how can you intentionally pass that on?
- Talk about your own thirst for knowledge. Are you modeling curiosity and a desire to learn new things? Note that this does not come naturally to everyone, as not all people are innately curious. So definitely look for areas where you can improve if this is a struggle for you.
- Talk about the nuances between knowledge of facts and wisdom, which brings experience and sometimes morality to bear. Are there ways you can help your children understand this distinction?



JULY

ASSERTIVENESS

DEFINITION

The ability to stand up for oneself and one's needs/beliefs without harming another party

MODELING ASSERTIVENESS

- When at a restaurant or drive thru and you are given the wrong order, model assertiveness by kindly, but firmly letting your server know that this was not what you ordered and asking that they bring you a new one. This is so important when it comes to teaching children the value of money as well. When we pay for something, it is our expectation to get what we asked for.
- If you are standing in line and someone cuts in front of you, politely but firmly let that person know that there is a line and point them to the back. You might say something like "excuse me, the back of the line is there." Then you might kindly give the person the benefit of the doubt (here modelling the kind part of assertiveness) and say "it can be a little confusing as to where the back is" and smile warmly.
- Let your children see you be assertive on their behalf. Whether that be with teachers, other parents, or even other children. Showing that YOU are not afraid to be polite but firm on their behalf teaches them that they deserve to be assertive themselves.
- Model assertiveness by standing up for others. Perhaps you notice that someone is being overlooked in a line, or being mistreated in some way. Tell your children, "this is one of those times where we need to be assertive on behalf of someone else" and then step in and say something. Teaching children to be an upstander instead of a bystander is extremely important in caring for others, as well as teaching assertiveness.

ACTIVITIES FOR INSTILLING ASSERTIVENESS

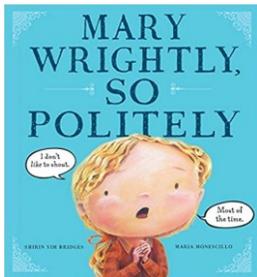
- At Future Focused Parenting we love rehearsing, and rehearsing assertiveness is a fantastic way to strengthen their assertive muscles. Pretend to take their toy and have them practice saying in a kind, but firm voice "excuse me, it's my turn. Please give the toy back and you can play with it once my turn is over." Or you can pretend to be at a restaurant and the wrong order comes, having your child say politely but firmly, "excuse me, but I asked for no pickles."
- Have your children order their own meals at restaurants. This is so important! Children who grow up engaging with adults and asking for what they want are more likely to feel confident engaging with adults or their peers in an assertive way because that muscle is getting flexed out in the world.
- If you have more than one child, use the sibling relationship as a constant way of fostering assertiveness. Allow each child to be assertive with the other, always in a kind but firm way. From a young age you can give them the words to say, and as they get older allow them to be assertive with you watching or guiding.
- Teach your children it's always ok to ask. A great example of this happened when Kira took her children to Great Wolf Lodge. Each child got a punch card for various activities and items at the gift shop. One of the items was something her son didn't want (a bracelet) but they had a key chain which he did want and which was the same price. Kira encouraged him to ask politely if he could have a key chain instead of the bracelet. She warned him that the answer might be no, and they would need to leave it after that, but he could always ask. He asked politely, explaining the situation, asking for them to make an exception - and they did!



QUOTE OF THE MONTH:

"The practice of assertiveness: being authentic in our dealings with others; treating our values and persons with decent respect in social contexts; refusing to fake the reality of who we are or what we esteem in order to avoid disapproval; the willingness to stand up for ourselves and our ideas in appropriate ways in appropriate contexts." – Nathaniel Branden

SUGGESTED READING



Mary Wrightly, So Politely
by Shirin Yim Bridges (Author), Maria Monescillo (Illustrator)

Mary Wrightly is the best-behaved little girl around. She always politely says please and thank you and even “I’m sorry” when something isn’t her fault. But when a shopper comes between Mary and the blue elephant toy she wants to buy for her beloved baby brother, will Mary just let the woman walk away with it? Speak up, Mary! Monescillo’s charming illustrations capture the spirit of this gentle look at how asserting oneself is not rude, and even occasionally out-and-out necessary.

PARENT DISCUSSION

- Talk about the ways you demonstrate assertiveness and how to avoid the two extremes (steamrolling the other party or allowing yourself to be a doormat). Try to open yourselves to constructive feedback about where you can improve. It can be challenging not to go off in the ditch on one side or the other of this issue, so be open to ideas!
- Be sure to talk with nannies, teachers or other caregivers and let them know you are working to foster assertiveness. Tell them to encourage your child(ren) to speak up for themselves in settings that serve as safe practice opportunities (such as a restaurant if their order is wrong). When all the adults are on the same page, the children receive a consistent and reinforced message, which strengthens it. If you have more than one child, use the sibling relationship as a constant way of fostering assertiveness. Allow each child to be assertive with the other, always in a kind but firm way. From a young age you can give them the words to say, and as they get older allow them to be assertive with you watching or guiding.
- Consider discussing your family of origin and how assertiveness was modeled – or not – for you as a child, and how that impacted you. You may uncover why you are not assertive enough, or why you lean toward being overly dominant. These insights can assist you in finding a more productive way to demonstrate assertiveness going forward.



AUGUST CONSERVANCY

MODELING CONSERVANCY

- When you are taking care of your belongings, whether that be making the bed, tidying up your house, folding and putting away laundry, or even unpacking bags after a grocery store trip, talk about how these are all ways we demonstrate conservancy. Be ready for questions around this and answer them accordingly as well. For instance, if you are asked why you put away the clothes, you might say, "I'm thankful to have clothes to wear, so I want to take good care of them by folding them neatly so they are ready the next time I need them."
- In addition to gratitude for our things, you can also model the other huge positive reason for conservancy: taking care of the earth. When you take excellent care of your belongings, they last longer, meaning you don't need to replace them as often, keeping you off the consumerism cycle and putting less in landfills. You can chat about this with your children when the opportunity presents itself. For example, if you get complaints during the dishwasher emptying talk of "be careful with the plates" (again), you might consider saying something like the following: "Because we've been gentle with these dishes, washed them after meals, and put them away carefully, they've lasted our family for several years. How nice that we haven't had to use our resources to buy new ones during that time. Our dishes are staying out of the trash, which helps the planet, too!"
- This works for larger scale conservancy as well. You can explain to your children why you belong to a Buy Nothing community, why you recycle, or how it benefits the environment when we try to have a smaller footprint. If your family drives an electric car, composts, or grows your own food, these are all wonderful launchpads for a conversation.
- Be sure to let your children "catch" you doing all sorts of basic tasks that model good stewardship of your belongings and care for the earth. A few ideas:
 - *Purchase and utilize reusable grocery bags
 - *Donate ill-fitting or used clothes rather than tossing them
 - *Recycle, and consider a compost bin or small veggie/herb garden
 - *Pick up after yourself (dishes, clothes, etc.)
 - *Make your bed
 - *Perform home and yard maintenance
 - *Regularly care for your things through dusting, vacuuming, tidying, not leaving items where they can be stepped on or lost, washing your car....the list is nearly endless!

DEFINITION

Caring for one's personal belongings as well as the greater environment and earth

ACTIVITIES FOR INSTILLING CONSERVANCY

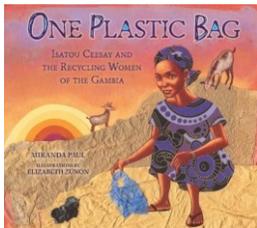
- When clearing the table at restaurants, help your child put their items in the correct receptacle (compost, recycle, trash) and explain why we do this. Eventually, you can invite them to take charge of the sorting and discarding in the appropriate bin.
- Even though they might not do a perfect job, especially if they are young, invite (or require) children to help with house/yard/car maintenance. They will learn to develop "pride of ownership" by taking good care of these shared blessings and can learn to do many jobs that will prove invaluable as they grow older and can take on heftier chores. Plus, a car wash water fight with the hose is wonderful family bonding!
- Brainstorm conservancy ideas before a special purchase. "If we buy that toy, can you tell me how you will take care of it?" "If I get you the bike for your birthday, what do you think we should do to keep it looking and working its best?" "If we get the new family car we've been talking about, should we think through some rules to keep it clean?" The practical ideas children come up with are actually impressive, and they are more likely to follow "rules" that they thought of, which is a win!
- When your children are "done" with toys and clothes, help them sort, bag and deliver them to a charitable organization or donation bin. You could also consider posting them on a swap or Buy Nothing site. Any of these ideas keep items out of landfills, with the added benefit of passing things on to others who need or want them.



QUOTE OF THE MONTH:

“Conservation is Humanity caring for the Future” - Nancy Newhall

SUGGESTED READING



One Plastic Bag By Miranda Paul

This book shares the story of Isatou Ceesay and her recycling efforts. When plastic bags began to pile up in her native Gambia bringing mosquitos and disease, strangled crops and dead livestock, Isatou knew something needed to change. She figured out a way to recycle the plastic bags, transforming her community along the way. An inspirational story about how local stewardship efforts can have a global impact.

PARENT DISCUSSION

- Talk through your own conservancy (or lack thereof). Consider how you can best model this in your lives at home, at work and in social settings.
- Consider the environments your children encounter: school, dance lessons, after school clubs. Do these facilities offer recycling, advocate reusing equipment, or teach your child to care for their supplies? If not, could you help start a sports gear swap or get a petition going to bring recycling bins into these facilities?
- Talk with other caregivers, teachers and families to let them know your children are expected to tidy up toys, discard any refuse appropriately, and take extra great care of things that are not their own. This will let these other adults know they can have the same expectations, and will make your children a delight to have in the classroom/friend's house/childcare facility, etc.



SEPTEMBER

INITIATIVE

MODELING INITIATIVE

- Initiative is big vocabulary word, and an even bigger concept, especially for young children. As such, you'll likely need to talk about it as you model it, at least at first. For instance, when you see the full garbage can and just start taking it out, you might say, "I saw that the garbage was full, so I decided to take care of it. When you see something that needs to be done and do it, that's called initiative. We value initiative in our family."
- Work to let your children "catch" you taking care of things like emptying the dishwasher, tidying the house or watering plants when it's needed. This also goes for things like caring for pets (refilling their food or water dishes, taking them for walks, etc.) and taking care of messes/spills right away. This shows them what it looks like in a tangible way to show initiative, and is another of initiative's many side benefits. Initiative is essentially the opposite of procrastination! When you demonstrate initiative you are showing your children how wonderful it feels to take care of something right away, and then be able to know it's off your plate.
- Regularly take the initiative to volunteer for things when and where appropriate. This is another fantastic opportunity to discuss how initiative sometimes means filling a need and helping others. When your children see you offering to help or volunteering for a job at school, they get a sense of how to jump in themselves. You may soon hear them saying, "I'll do it!" when you mention a need around the house or if a family member needs help.
- Simple courtesies can also demonstrate initiative. When you see someone struggling with a heavy load near a door, you can go hold the door for them. Or you might be the person who runs after someone who dropped an item to make sure they get it back. This is a great foundation for conversations about how while it may be *easy* to just watch, or be lazy, or assume someone else will help, it is *best* to help others out in small ways. It also makes the recipient of the kindness feel great, which is an added bonus!

DEFINITION

The ability to judge what needs to be done and take action, especially without suggestion from other people.

ACTIVITIES FOR INSTILLING INITIATIVE

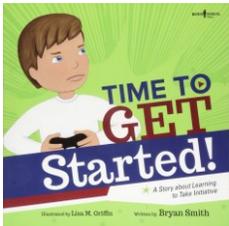
- Come up with a positive rewards system for catching children in the moment of showing initiative. Perhaps you give out a ticket each time you see them do something without being asked and when they've saved up a certain number of tickets a small reward is given.
- Before something needs doing, ask to see if your child notices. For example, "we are about to leave the house, what do you think we need to do before we go?" Or, "you just finished coloring in your coloring book, what do you think needs to happen before you go play upstairs?"
- Encourage boredom. From boredom creativity and initiative are born! Create space in each day that is unplanned where children have to entertain themselves and figure out on their own what to do.
- Have regular "Initiative" time where you stand with your child, look around the house, and ask, "what needs to be done? Let's do it!"
- Have chores available that are specifically set up for a child who shows initiative. In other words, chores that aren't expected of them, but are available if the child would like to earn some extra money. Please note, these should NOT be the only chores the child does. Required, age-appropriate chores should be doled out without reward or incentive. Initiative chores would be available on top of their required chores.



QUOTE OF THE MONTH:

“Genius is initiative on fire” - Holbrook Jackson

SUGGESTED READING



Time to Get Started By Bryan Smith

Blake doesn't understand why he has to clean his room **RIGHT NOW**. He'll get to it eventually! Luckily for Blake, his mom is there to help him understand why it's important to get started on tasks right away. By exploring his reasons for putting off the things he is supposed to do, Blake soon realizes that he is simply making excuses. Join Blake as he and his mom go through a few simple steps to help him take initiative and get things done.

PARENT DISCUSSION

- Consider areas where you may be stifling initiative by coming to your child's rescue. For example, when they are bored do you figure out how to entertain them, or allow them to entertain themselves? When they don't want to clean their room, do you end up doing it to avoid an argument? Think about the areas where you may need to allow your children the opportunity to solve these problems themselves.
- Think of ways you can encourage your child to show initiative out in the world, whether that's pointing out a piece of trash that needs to be thrown away, or encouraging them to talk with a teacher about an activity they'd like the class to try. Discuss together ways you can prioritize building initiative in your child.
- Get honest about whether or not you are modeling this well. Do your children often see you say "oh, I'll do that later" and then the task never gets done? Think about ways you could make small changes, and be vocal about them, so that you can foster this change in your home. As you do, you might say things like "I really need to be better at showing initiative, so even though I don't feel like doing the dishes, I'm going to get up and get them done so that we can read a story together!"



OCTOBER COURAGE

MODELING COURAGE

- When you feel nervous about something, talk through your feelings while letting your child(ren) see that you still took action. This could be as simple as a presentation at work, trying a new activity, or facing a big decision. You might say something like, “I’m feeling a little scared about going to this yoga class today, because it’s a new kind of exercise for me and I won’t know anyone. But I know it’s the right thing to do. It takes some courage to do something you’re nervous about! I’ll be sure to let you know how it goes.” Then be sure to follow through and talk afterwards.
- If your child is facing a new activity (say ziplining on vacation, or learning to dive in the deep end), try doing it together as a family. Kids love the support of trying something with people they trust. Also, you may need to go first to show your children that it’s safe and ok to experiment with something even if it’s a little nerve-wracking.
- Assertiveness can take some courage, particularly for the introvert. So as you get ready to talk to a customer service representative, or point out incorrect change at the store, don’t miss the opportunity to demonstrate what’s happening. Discuss how it can be scary to talk to people we don’t know, and how it’s never fun to tell someone they’ve made a mistake. Then follow this up with letting them watch you do it. Talk afterwards about how much better it feels once you’ve been brave and done it!
- You can also try our “I do it, we do it, you do it” approach for courage building. Here’s how this works: Let’s say your child is afraid of the big slide at the local playground. You would go down it first, then go down with your child in your lap, and finally let them try it alone once ready. This strategy leads children gently toward a new skill rather than forcing it, which builds courage naturally. (For more on this strategy, check out our [“Kids and Chores”](#) podcast episode!)

DEFINITION

Strength and confidence to act in the midst of fear.

ACTIVITIES FOR INSTILLING COURAGE

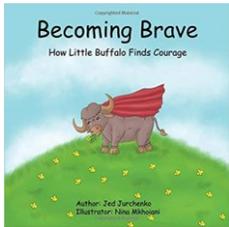
- Purposely schedule an activity for your family that will be fun, but maybe a little intimidating as well. Ideas to consider are a waterslide park, ropes course, a challenging hike, snorkeling or scuba diving, or ziplining. Talk about the butterflies you have before trying it but encourage everyone in the family to at least attempt it. Then go get ice cream or another treat after to celebrate your courage!
- Let your child (at the appropriate age/stage of development) start to interact with people in the community. Whether this means calling the local community center to find out what time public swim hours are held or asking a sales associate for help finding something in the store, these are simple entry points for handling nervousness by taking action rather than avoiding the scenario.
- Let your child lead the way by asking about something they’re afraid of and designing a way to practice handling it. Perhaps they are afraid of the dark, and you can provide them some tools to cope (a flashlight for restroom breaks in the night, a nightlight, a special reassuring phrase they can repeat to themselves, etc.). Or maybe for your child it’s meeting new people. If that’s the case, you might set up some play dates with new friends, or go to the park and model some introductions, and then let them try. When children share their concerns, we can gain great insights into ideas for customized courage-building opportunities.



QUOTE OF THE MONTH:

"I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear." — Nelson Mandela

SUGGESTED READING



[Becoming Brave: How Little Buffalo Finds Courage](#)
by Jed Jurchenko (Author), Nina Mkhiani (Illustrator)

Help your child learn to be brave and do hard things. Children will adore the story of how little buffalo finds his courage as he runs through the wind and rain with his family. Parents will appreciate the positive self-regulation strategies and affirmation skills that are taught throughout the book. After the story, parents and children can dive deeper into each of the courageous strategies that Little Buffalo learns, through numerous interactive activities. Children will learn how to identify their storm, take deep buffalo-breaths, how to think like a buffalo, and how to stick with their herd as they tackle the challenges that come their way.

DISCUSSION WITH YOUR CHILDREN

- Talk with your children about what it looks like to have courage. Explain that it's normal to feel fear or worry and encourage them to remember to embrace those feelings, even as they push forward.
- Before they are about to embark on something courageous (say rock climbing, giving a presentation at school or going down the big slide at the park) talk through coping strategies and remind them that they most likely *will* feel afraid, so that doesn't surprise them. You might say, "alright honey, you are probably going to feel a little scared up there. That's normal! When you do, what can you say to yourself to remind yourself the fear is normal? What tools can you use to stay calm and be courageous?"
- For older children, explain the way the brain works. Fear is the brain's way of saying that the stakes are high. Long ago, high stakes meant a scary beast that could kill you. Today, the brain still responds as if there is a scary beast, even in scenarios where things are perfectly safe. In our modern world most often fear is simply a cue that what we are doing is important or out of our comfort zone.



NOVEMBER

THANKFULNESS

DEFINITION

Noun form of *thankful*: being full of warm, friendly feelings of gratitude

MODELING THANKFULNESS

- Prioritize thankfulness yourself, by making sure your children witness you thanking people in your community who serve, such as store clerks, baristas or auto repair technicians.
- Go out of your way to ensure that sometimes your words of thanks are directed toward your children. Let them know how much you appreciate their willing response to your instruction, or how grateful you are that they help around the house. Point out things they've done that are kind and thank them for it.
- Consistently demonstrate thankfulness around your belongings. Allowing your child to actually hear that you're so grateful for your warm house, clean clothes or reliable car goes a long way. It can be particularly helpful to juxtapose this with a wanted item. For example, "I'm so grateful for this van that gets us everywhere we need to go safely, and that really helps when I start feeling like I want a new car." It's amazing how this can translate to your child's feelings about their belongings including everything from toys to the latest trend in shoes or the most recent video game.
- Verbally and regularly thank your spouse/partner for everyday, mundane tasks. "Thank you for doing the laundry," or "Thanks for mowing the lawn today" are great phrases for children to hear. Not only does this model thankfulness, it also demonstrates the importance of not taking people for granted no matter how small the task they've performed for you, or how often they've performed it.
- Keep a gratitude journal and let your children "catch" you writing in it, or occasionally show them what you wrote. It might inspire them to start one of their own! Many excellent gratitude journals are available at bookstores, or to easily purchase online. See the resource section below for one option. Research shows that writing down what you're thankful for 30 minutes before bed helps you sleep better, so this is also great for your (and your children's) health.

ACTIVITIES FOR INSTILLING THANKFULNESS

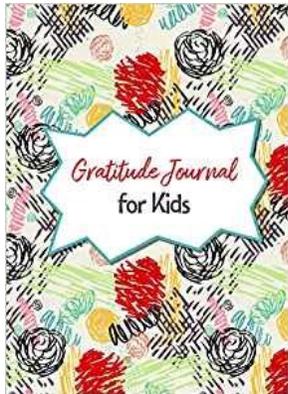
- Oversee gratitude development in the early years. Practice situations where they will need to demonstrate thankfulness, such as opening gifts at a party. Encourage them to verbally express gratitude until they have formed the habit themselves. Even non-verbal children can do this with sign language, so don't hesitate to start early.
- Create a gratitude jar and decorate it. Provide slips of paper so the kids can jot down things they're thankful for and pop them in the jar. You could even do this at a set time each week, or over family dinner. During a sad/difficult day (or anytime your children could use a reminder to be appreciative), pull out a few and reflect together on the great features of your lives.
- During the holidays, create a gratitude wreath or tree. Write or paint what the kids are grateful for on ornaments and use these to decorate the tree or wreath.
- Require your children to write thank you notes. The act of acknowledging a gift, service or kindness is so precious and valuable. Children who don't write yet can dictate their gratitude and the parent can write the note. Then the child simply signs their own name. Even the youngest toddler can scribble a small drawing on a card for their benefactor.
- Start with the senses by going on a gratitude walk. As you walk through a park or even around your neighborhood, share what you notice. Talk about what you are thankful that you can see, hear, touch, smell, etc. The sights and sounds of nature are a great launch pad for this exercise and walking itself has also been shown to help with positive thinking, which opens the mind to being thankful.



QUOTE OF THE MONTH:

“Thanksgiving is the enemy of discontent and dissatisfaction.” – Harry A. Ironside

SUGGESTED READING



Gratitude Journal for Kids: Daily Prompts and Questions

By Brenda Nathan

This journal includes daily questions and ideas to help prompt children to write what they are thankful for. There are also blank pages for drawing those things. Keep in mind that there are many great gratitude journals on the market for adults as well, including some that take only one minute a day, so check them out!

PARENT DISCUSSION

- Talk about ways to encourage each other as parents to be grateful, even when it's tempting to complain about how hard parenting is. If you catch yourself or your spouse/partner grumbling, try to divert back to positivity. Discuss the best ways to do this.
- Try asking your partner where you could improve in making them feel appreciated. This is vulnerable, but it allows parents to be honest and speak candidly about what they need. It also helps parents stretch out of their comfort zone and avoid complacency or taking their co-parent for granted.
- Don't be afraid to ask other adults in your child's life for their help with this. Talk together about how to approach coaches, nannies, grandparents or teachers to garner their help. See if they might be willing to also pointedly model gratitude, or help you remind your children to thank people who help them. Often children receive certain aspects of instruction about life better from adults who aren't their parents, so utilize your village!



DECEMBER

EMPATHY

MODELING EMPATHY

- When your children express their feelings, whether they are old enough to name them or not, be sure to validate and acknowledge the feelings. Saying things like, “I can tell you are feeling frustrated,” or normalizing the feeling by saying, “that makes sense to me, I would feel that way if that happened to me as well,” are great ways of not only modeling empathy, but also making your children feel seen and heard.
- If a negative interaction happens out in the world (a grumpy cashier, someone rude in traffic) model empathy for your children by saying “It seems like that person is having a hard day. I know how that feels; I have hard days too.” You could also talk about what might have happened that day, week, or month for that person, and how it may be impacting their behavior.
- Name your feelings for your children. Part of how they will learn to recognize feelings in themselves and in others is to see this ability modeled well. When you are frustrated, you can say, “I’m feeling frustrated right now.” If they see you are sad, instead of stuffing your own feelings, it’s ok to say, “I’m feeling a bit sad right now. Do you ever feel sad? You do? Well then you know it’s totally normal! Did you eventually feel better? Then we know that I will too!”
- Be sure that when your children see you talking with friends or family that might be having a hard time, they see you allow room for the feelings being presented, instead of offering solutions or “at leasts”. If you model good listening and loving, they will learn how to do this themselves.

DEFINITION

the ability to understand and share the feelings of another

ACTIVITIES FOR INSTILLING EMPATHY

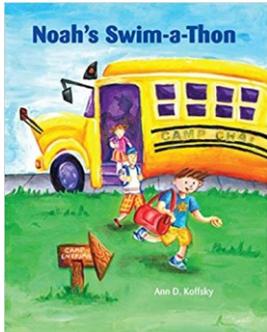
- When children report an incident with a child at school (or if you see something happen at the park or in a playgroup), help them think about what else might be going on for that child that may contribute to them acting this way. Also encourage your children to think about days where they may have also let feelings affect their choices. Finally, you can ask your children to think about a time when they may have had similar feelings and remind them that those feelings are all normal.
- Use media and books as ways to foster empathy by discussing the feelings of the characters in the stories they read and see. What might that character be feeling? Why? Have you ever felt that way? Do you think these feelings are normal? Use questions as a way of helping your children see the connection between themselves and the characters in the story.
- If you have more than one child, use the sibling relationship as a constant way of fostering empathy. Ask questions like, “how do you think your brother/sister is feeling after you took her toy?” or “when someone hits your body how does it feel? How do you think your brother/sister feels when you’ve hit their body?” This can be done with positive behavior as well by saying, “You did a great job listening to your brother/sister tell their made-up story. How does it feel when someone really listens when you talk? Do you think your brother/sister might be feeling that way too? Great job!”
- Studies show that fostering an understanding in children that we were all babies once and we all started in the same way is a great way to foster empathy. When you see a baby crying explain to your children that the baby is expressing its feelings, just like your children express theirs. Help them recall younger years when maybe their emotional intelligence was less developed and talk about the ways they have grown and changed, just as the baby will grow and change.



QUOTE OF THE MONTH:

“Empathy may be the single most important quality that must be nurtured to give peace a fighting chance.” - Arundhati Ray

SUGGESTED READING



Noah's Swim-a-Thon

Written by
Ann D. Koffsky

Noah loves everything about summer camp -- except swimming. Nothing can get Noah into the pool until he learns about the camp swim-a-thon that will help give other children a chance to attend the camp he loves.

This is a book about a Jewish boy and an absolute favorite in Kira's home. In her opinion it is one of the best kids' books about empathy out there and beautifully demonstrates what it looks like for a child to truly embrace an empathetic approach to the world.

PARENT DISCUSSION

- Talk about ways you are parenting with empathy and areas where perhaps you could improve. Don't be afraid to also think about how you express empathy with each other and how that modeling may positively or negatively foster empathy.
- If you haven't ever read *The 5 Love Languages*, give it a read and then discuss your different love languages. This will not only help strengthen your relationship, but it will also help you model caring for others as they need to be cared for. Finally, you could give some thought to your children's love languages and discuss how you may need to adjust the way you express your love to them (and receive love from them) with this new information.

