

## **Dare To Share**

### **Parenting Strategies – July 2009**

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“If you don’t know the trees you may be lost in the forest, but if you don’t know the stories you may be lost in life.” — Quoted from a Siberian elder

When was the last time you shared a story with your child about a personal success, failure or disappointment? If you have to stop and think it has probably been too long. We all have stories to share, and it is through our stories that we transmit lessons and connect with our children via our emotions, choices and actions. For our children, stories provide evidence and support to the life lessons that we desire to share, engaging them in the details of how we solved a particular problem, overcame a challenge, dealt with an emotional hardship, or dove into an unknown experience.

Sharing personal stories takes time, and in the hurried lives that we often lead the opportunities to incorporate stories get replaced by what I call the “should have/could have” approach to parenting. This approach most commonly sounds like, “You should have studied more” or “You should have gone to bed earlier and you could have gotten up on time.” This is one way to give advice, but it will often fall on deaf ears. So while this approach may seem efficient, it is not particularly effective. Ideally we want to be sure that we use a mix of strategies to convey the advice and guidance that we wish to impart on our children.

### **What makes a good story?**

You probably have found that some stories about your personal successes, failures and challenges are easily relayed in the moment of a situation or event. For instance, I recall when my daughter lost the top scoop of ice cream from her cone and how I readily shared a story about the first time I lost a favorite flavor to the sizzling tar of our local ice cream stand's parking lot. It was through this story that I was able to recount my father's reaction and solution to the

problem, and I was also able to comfort her. It was a moment where we both looked on the ground and saw the casualties of other cones, wondering together just how hot it was and later learned it had been 101 degrees. I could have gone down the “could have/ should have” advice path, but clearly that approach would not have made the same impression as the ice cream story.

You probably have stories that you have not had the chance or presence of mind to share with your child, or stories for which your child's life has not yet presented an opportune time to incorporate. You may even have life lesson stories that your child is not yet ready to emotionally or developmentally hear. For instance, I have a personal story about a scary situation at a party that I will eventually tell my daughter, as it will also be a good launching off point for a discussion about safety. Assess the theme and content of your stories and look to recount them when your child is prepared and when an appropriate occasion arises.

Take a moment to think about what life lesson stories you have to share with your child; some might be very current and others might be from more distant times. The neat thing is that by virtue of living life we are continuously accumulating stories to share. It is through the stories we tell that our child gets to hear the steps we took, learns about the progressions we made, and discovers how we dealt with challenge, risk, success and failure.

**Consider following some or all of these steps when incorporating stories into your parenting approach:**

1. Take a typical day and be acutely aware of how many times you use the “should have/ could have” approach to give advice to your child.
2. Make a list of a few stories from your personal story bank that you would like to share with your child, and think about when you might share these.
3. Identify life lessons that you would like to reinforce with your child either now or in the future, and then select stories from your own life that best illustrate what you did right or wrong, or what you might have done differently.
4. Try to share your stories when there is a natural opportunity to do so.

5. Consider writing down your stories and giving them to your child.
6. In telling your stories, invite your child to share what he or she might have done or ask what they think happened next.
7. Ask your child what he or she got out of the story and then also be clear in what you hope they got out of hearing it.
8. Don't change what is true in the story, but rather share what you wish you had done differently or had known or considered beforehand.
9. Be prepared to answer questions that your child asks.
10. Remember, some stories are worth telling more than once!

Have fun thinking about the personal stories that you want to share, recognizing that some might be humorous while others might be sobering. Most importantly, dare to share the lessons of your past so that they may shape the actions of your child's future.