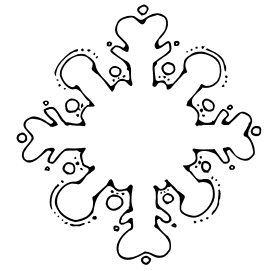


Counselor's Corner

Jennifer Sheppard

December 2005



What Are You Teaching Your Children?

Do your children have so many toys that you have difficulty finding enough space for all of them? Is it hard to see the floor in your child's bedroom or play area due to all the toys?

Although your children may appear to have plenty of toys, do they still beg and plead for more? On the other hand, now that the holiday season is upon us, are you excited about surprising your kids with some really special presents this holiday?

We live in a society in which we are constantly bombarded by messages and advertisements convincing us that we have to have the latest car, gadget, or toy. We are reminded that whatever we have is no longer good enough and we have to have the bigger and better version. It is easy for us to get swept up by the desire to have the latest toy or gadget not only for ourselves, but to provide it for our children whenever capable. It is human nature to want to provide our children with the best in life. We want to give them the things we didn't have, or we want to save them from any challenging or difficult situations that may come their way.

Although our intentions are good, we must look at what we are *not* teaching our children by providing them with the latest video game. We must think about how we are stealing valuable life experiences from our children when we rescue them from consequences or any negative experience.

As parents, it is critical to teach our children life skills. In life, we cannot always have whatever we want, whenever we want. When your children have to earn the money to pay for a toy, you'll find that they take better care of it. They have learned the value of hard work, delaying gratification, and the value of treating their

things with care. The next time your children are begging for a toy and it would be easier just to buy it; think about what you are not teaching your child. Or when you want to give them something you weren't lucky enough to have, think about whether your child is learning how to deal with disappointment or how to work towards a goal and earn the toy.

It is equally tempting for parents to rescue their children from any difficult experiences. It is very hard for parents to watch their child in pain as they struggle with a teacher, friend, or a consequence of a poor choice. The immediate temptation is to solve the problem for your child. However, by doing so, you are robbing your child of the opportunity to learn invaluable problem-solving or coping skills. In life, there are situations that are unpleasant, unfair, or difficult. If we continually rescue our children from these experiences, we are not letting them learn critical problem solving skills that will help them become resilient young adults. The next time your child complains about how he/she was mistreated by a classmate or friend, resist the temptation to call the other parent. Rather listen to your child. Empathize with him/her. Then, help him/her problem solve by asking what he/she plans to do. If he/she can't think of anything, ask your child if he/she wants to hear what others have done in that situation.

Unfortunately, we cannot be with our children the rest of their lives to save them from difficult situations. Rather, we can teach our children how to handle these problems when they happen. We can teach our children that we are there for them, to listen and support them as they learn strategies to cope with frustration, make better decisions, and be responsible. Ultimately, our goal as parents is to provide our children the love and support they need as they learn how to be responsible, caring, resilient children that have the coping and problem solving skills to manage whatever life throws their way.

