



Relationships

The Adlerian Team

Building positive memories with your families

By Cathy Lumsden

Have you ever chased a rainbow or followed a sunset? If you have, it's likely something you've never forgotten. If you have not, then you can begin building positive memories today!

According to Alfred Adler, our memories are "windows of our soul." By keeping happy, joyful memories alive and real, we can actually feel better about ourselves. When we relax and have fun with our children, we are helping them build a bank account of positive memories that they can draw from throughout their lives and even pass on to the next generation.

Our lives have become so fast-paced, we tend to only 'exist' and not enjoy some of life's simplest experiences. Our memories may reflect only the negative times, the times we regret or wish were different. Consequently, many individuals become depressed, stressed or bored, and are not able to enjoy themselves or their families.

Do you remember as a child sitting or jumping in a warm mud puddle and then finding it difficult to understand why your mother or father was so upset? All you wanted to do was see the water ripple around you and feel the warm mud ooze between your toes. Meanwhile, your parent was probably thinking "Great, how am I going to get Sarah out of the puddle, changed and to school/daycare on time? Which memory do you hold on to – your mother getting angry or the water rippling around you? Chances are you probably remember your mother's strong negative reaction rather than the enjoyment of the mud puddle! Can you now, as a parent, allow your children to enjoy such pleasant events such as sitting in a puddle, eating mud pies, etc? There are many ways to help children build positive memories...

1. Show your children their baby photographs and discuss with them what was going on in their lives, where you lived, and how you felt being their mom or dad at the time. Children of all ages, even teenagers, love to hear what they were like as small children. During these special moments, focus on the positive characteristics of your children when they were young. Be careful not to add "why can't you be like that now?"
2. Similarly, children enjoy hearing about their birth stories. Tell them about your trip to the hospital, who was there, what time they were born, which visitors came to visit them in the hospital, and how you felt bringing your new bundle home.
3. Stop yourself and your children to really look at nature – flowers, sunsets, or thousands of diamonds glistening on fresh snow. Help your children experience these scenes by using all of their senses – touch the soft petals of a flower, smell the aroma, see the vibrant colours, and listen for bees buzzing around doing their work. Small children notice the beauty of nature, but, too frequently, we whisk them away, hurrying to get to work or school.

4. Establish different traditions in your home. For example, make Sunday evening dinner special where everyone helps to prepare the food, then everyone watches a television program or plays board games. In the summer, plan a family/friend baseball game once a month on a Saturday afternoon. Another tradition may be cuddling together and reading a story together before bedtime every evening.
5. Play "twenty memories" instead of "twenty questions" with your children.
6. Allow time for PLAY with your children. Get down on the floor, experience moments of playfulness and excitement. With older children, learn about their music – which bands do they like, listen and learn some of their words. When they were little we knew every "Sharon, Lois and Bram" song – why not now?
7. Teach your children how to remove negative stress. Provide an environment where they feel safe to express their feelings and listen to the feelings behind the words.
8. Encourage them to put away their unwanted stress or fears into boxes, desks, walls until they are able to express them. Help them to relax their bodies by slow breathing, counting to ten or by using imagery. Assisting your children to relax and cope with stress helps to free their minds in order to build positive memories.

The key to reminding yourself to STOP and smell the roses is to leave notes all over your house such as "slow down," "where is the fire?" and "see, hear, smell, taste." In addition, ask your son or daughter to draw pictures to use as reminders. I am sure many of you are already using these and numerous other suggestions, so please celebrate and honour yourself for the many things you do for your children and recognize how many wonderful memories are already deposited into their memory banks.

How about treating yourself and your family to a nice gooey mud puddle, or a beautiful sunset? These become the stories which are told over and over through the years and re-create warm and loving connections. You will be creating special moments and your kids will remember the "playful" you!

Resource: "Free to Feel Great" Terry Orlick.

Cathy Lumsden is an associate at the Adlerian Counselling and Consulting Group Inc. She has 18 years experience in counselling individuals, families and groups. She has facilitated training programs and professional seminars focused on conflict resolution, team effectiveness, communication and stress management in both Canada and the United States. Cathy has been the Director of Training and Development at the Mind/Body Connection Inc., in Wayne, Pennsylvania. Please write to us at The Adlerian Counselling & Consulting Group, at 1729 Bank Street, Suite 205, Ottawa K1V 7Z5, call 737-5553 or e-mail us at info@adleriancentre.com with your reactions or ideas for this column.