**Parents as Life-Long Teachers**

by Jane Nelsen, Co-author of Parents Who Love Too Much and the Positive Discipline Series

Most parents want to be life-long teachers to their children - and for their children to be life-long learners. However, many fall short because of one or more of the five traps that defeat lifelong teaching and learning. The good news is that understanding these traps will help you avoid them. Even better, you can use the five keys to lifelong teaching and learning.

Four Traps that Defeat Lifelong Teaching and Learning

1.  Failure to consider the long-range results of parenting methods  
2.  Excessive control - "for the child's own good"  
3.  Lectures - too much "telling", and not enough exploring  
4.  Over-protection and/or rescuing

Four Keys to Life-long Teaching and Learning

1.  Considering the long-range effects of parenting methods  
2.  Helping children explore the consequences of their choices instead of imposing punishments   
3. Involving children in the creation of routines, plans, and solutions to problems.  
4. Having faith in the resiliency of children and allowing them to develop their "disappointment" skills

The first, trap is foundational to all the others. Most parents do not understand (or don't remember) that children are always making decisions based on their experiences. They are deciding such things as, "Am I capable or incapable? Is the world safe or threatening? Therefore, how should I behave?"

Consider the typical morning scene and how it includes all or the four traps. "Jacob, hurry up and get dressed. We'll be late. How many times do I have to tell you? No, you can't wear that! Oh let me do it, I can't let you walk around looking like that. Now we're late. What am I going to do with you?"

What is this parent teaching, and what is the child learning? Is the child deciding and learning, "I'm capable, I can contribute, I can learn from my mistakes? If kids, tease me about how I look, I'll do something different tomorrow."  
Or, is the child learning, "I'm not capable. Love means getting others to take care me. Tuning out a few lectures isn't such a big price to pay for a free ride."

Now consider another scene. Maria's mother helped her create a bedtime and morning routine chart. Mom took Polaroid pictures of Maria doing each task and pasted the pictures on charts taped to the refrigerator. Instead of engaging in lecturing or rescuing, Mom would say, "What is next on your routine chart?" Maria felt empowered to cooperate and contribute because she was involved in the process and got to tell Mom what was next instead of being told.

When Maria made mistakes, such as forgetting to put her bike away (which was run over by Dad's car), Dad didn't scold or offer to buy her a new one. Instead he helped her explore the consequences of her choices through what and how questions. "What happened?  What do you think caused that to happen? What ideas to you have to solve the problem?" In response to the last question, Maria thought it would be a good idea for Dad to buy her a new one.  Dad replied, "I'm not willing to do that, but I will help you figure out how much of your allowance you will need to save each week to buy your own - and I have a list of other jobs you can choose to earn extra money."

Maria learned that she is responsible for her choices but doesn't have to experience blame and shame for them. Instead Dad taught her how to think instead of what to think. She also learned that she is capable of handling disappointment and of focusing on solutions.

Lecturing, controlling, and rescuing are easier, but different skills are required of a life-long teacher helping children become life-long learners.

