

## Teachable Moments By Cathie Brooks

Most parents try to eliminate disappointment in their child's life. From cutesy Band-Aids to all out-rescue attempts, parents often seek to avoid anything unpleasant impacting their little one. Failure is a fruitful component of learning. Disappointments provide times to refresh perspectives and move children from fear and immaturity to an awareness of personal strengths and resources. Parents and children benefit when disappointments and even failures are viewed as teachable moments.

One of the most frequently expressed disappointments can come when a child feels excluded. This can happen on the playground, with a party invitation or, worse, *at* a party. How a parent responds can guide a child from being driven by emotions and/or the acceptance of others towards learning to see another's perspective on the same set of events and opportunities to handle slights with grace and aplomb.

When your teary child proclaims she has been left out of an event, postpone expressions of your own hurt. Equally important, quell the desire to rationalize or minimize the effect of the other child's actions on your child. Acknowledge your child's pain. A simple, "I'm sorry that happened", or, "I know that must hurt" are quick and valid pain easers. Let your little one's tears flow without promising to substitute the moon to make it all go away. Once the flood of initial emotions ebbs, a teachable moment surfaces. Lead your child away from seeing the classmate's actions as personal. Encourage positive reflections such as, "Maybe she could only invite a few people." or "Maybe she doesn't know how much you like her."

To move the experience from whining to a winning perspective, you might plan a one-on-one play date with the 'offender.' Your child can begin a friendship by being a friend. If it was just *attending* the event that was the disappointment to your child, planning a play date will not placate feelings. Then, it may be time to talk about motives for friendships. This latter scenario will take more time to explore but should be addressed. Sharing with a child about your friends and the foundations of those relationships provides your child a window into your heart values and can shape his approach to being a friend.

Another frequent disappointment to a child is receiving low marks on a test when expectations (either his or yours) were for an above average score. (This is separate from a learning related issue.) Again, parents need to suppress their disappointment (and anger) and guide a child through an objective evaluation similar to a workplace strategic planning session. The lesson is not to underscore the value of a good grade or assuage disappointments. The lesson is to learn what happened in the learning before additional struggles surface. Learning to realistically evaluate their own study habits can empower how a child moves forward.

Begin with a full review of the paper. Identify the problem: was it *curriculum content*, understanding *directions/questions* or was it carelessness? Review *how* your child prepared. Did he wait until the night before? Had he turned in all homework assignments related to this material? (If there were problems on the homework, did he either express his need or seek tutorial opportunities prior to the test?) Did he utilize group study times? Gently steer the review by asking questions and listening your child's response. Analyze test preparations. Questions such as, "How

long did you have to prepare?" and "Did your iPod help or distract your concentration?" Review teacher's comments on prior work.

If you decide to conference with the teacher, express that you do not fault her. Instead provide a 'head's up' that both you and your child are looking to improve study skills, not to change this paper's grade. It is fair to ask the teacher to suggest beneficial school or community resources. Request, based on her understanding of your child's learning style, ideas for how to prepare. Most teachers long to be asked, "What ideas would you suggest the child implement?"

Create specific plans for the next test such as re-write class notes in outline form, create acronyms to remember facts, intersperse blocks of study time with a fun physical activity. The goal is not the grade; the goal is improving learning. Your child will learn that you value, not a grade, but him and his learning potential. For both of you, that is a teachable moment.

Whether academic or social, challenges, disappointments and even failures, provide opportunities to move a child's perspective beyond the moment to larger value-rich concepts. Teachable moments lead to reachable reflections for you and your child.