

The Magic of Storytelling

BY CHRISTA MELNYK HINES



David Bakke fondly remembers the bedtime tales his parents told when he was a child. At about 8-years-old, Bakke began inventing his own stories and telling them to his younger brother when his brother had trouble falling asleep.

“Most of the stories I told (him) were fairly

simple and centered on animals and children. This pastime made for a closer relationship between us, gave me a sense of responsibility at a young age, and also fostered my creative spirit,” Bakke says, an editor for MoneyCrashers.com, who now shares his family’s storytelling tradition with his own son.

Why Tell Stories? Stories put our own experiences into perspective, comforting us with the knowledge that we aren’t alone in our human experiences. Stories serve to entertain, inspire, teach compassion and other values and stoke admiration and respect for the generations of individuals who came before us. Studies also show storytelling enhances a child’s language development, emergent reading and comprehension skills.

Teach Listening. Today’s hectic lifestyles affect our ability to listen to one another. “The most effective way that parents can encourage listening skills is through conversation and stories,” says Robin Moore, professional storyteller and author of *Creating a Family Storytelling Tradition: Awakening the Hidden Storyteller*.



A Penny for Your Thoughts? Nicole Keck, mom of three boys, ages 6, 4 and 2, found storytelling is like a window into her children’s minds. Her sons take turns telling stories before bedtime. “(The stories) may be funny or serious, true or fiction. We like...that it gives us precious insights into what they’re thinking about,” Keck says. “Knowing what makes them tick is an invaluable tool in guiding and supporting them. Besides, they’re very witty and it’s just great entertainment!”

Skip the Lecture. Dr. Jody Kellas, a communication professor and storytelling researcher at the University of Nebraska, says families who tell stories report higher levels of happiness, closeness and adaptability. Family stories also shape a child’s understanding of his family’s values, a sense of right and wrong and appropriate social behavior both in the family and in the world.

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“A story is a way to be in connection with our children and be in empathy and sympathy with them without giving advice or laying down the law. It’s much more effective because they’ll come up with their own solutions (as opposed to) if you were to just tell them what to do all of the time,” Moore says.



Dream Starter. Worries making it hard to fall asleep? Stacey Kaye, author of the *ParentSmart/Kid Happy* series, started sending her daughter Margo, 8, into dreamland with stories she calls “Dream Seeds” when her daughter was about four. “Margo would sometimes...share an anecdote about preschool or friends, usually expressing a concern or problem,” Kaye says.

For example, when her daughter expressed nervousness about sharing her seashell collection during show-and-tell the following day, Kaye and her daughter visualized the next day in story-like, step-by-step detail, from beginning:

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“It’s a bright and sunny day...you eat a yummy breakfast: peanut butter banana toast - one of your favorites...”

to end:

“When I drop you off at school, you give me a big hug and kiss. And when you walk into your classroom, the kids greet you and can’t wait to see what you have for show-and-tell...”

Kaye’s dream seeds still provide comforting reassurance and a sense of empowerment as Margo learns to manage day-to-day stressors and worries. For Kaye, the stories are a valuable way to connect with her daughter.

Author Christa Melnyk Hines is amazed how the words “Can I tell you a story?” magically turns her two rambunctious sons into captive listeners.

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