

Don't be quick to answer kids' queries

PARENTS CORNER



Marilyn Suttle

Don't be quick to answer questions

"Who should I invite to my party, mom?" "Do you think I should buy a CD with my birthday money?" "Why don't we eat at restaurants more often?"

Children sure ask a lot of questions. It can be fun to give opinions. It feels good to know the answers. As parents we may feel it is our duty to answer each question without delay. Beware, there are negative side effects to giving instant answers. The problem is, if we are too quick to answer questions, we steal golden opportunities from our children to analyze and explore the answers for themselves.

Bounce ideas first

Often, when a child asks you a question, he has already been thinking about the answer. Because kids are likely to have some idea of what the answer is, we can be helpful to our children by letting them bounce their ideas off of us first. Let's see what they already know before we step in with an answer. Answering too quickly robs kids from exploring their own ideas. If we want our kids to develop sharp thinking skills, we need to give them opportunities to explore their thoughts.

So, what do you do when a child asks you a question? Acknowledge the importance of the question. "Hmm, that's an interesting question." Give the question back to the child. "Why do you think the sky is blue?" Ask your child, "How else could you find the answer to your question?" This gives the child a chance to think of alternate ways to discover and learn. The process of searching for the answer may end up being more valuable than the answer itself.

When you hand questions back to your children, they may surprise you with how much they already know. Recently, a mom from one of my workshops had a success by using this technique. While driving home from school, her daughter asked, "What is probation?" Instead of her usual instant answer, mom asked, "What do you think it is?" Her daughter had it 90 percent right. In the process of explaining it to mom, she reinforced her understanding and mom was then able

to clarify the parts she didn't know while her daughter listened attentively.

Sometimes a child's question can leave us feeling frustrated. Giving the question back to the child frees a parent and gives ownership of the answer to the child. The child also feels pride in the answers she comes up with.

Child: "Vegetables stink! Why do I have to eat them?"

Parent: "That's a good question. Why do you think?"

Child: "Because there are vitamins in them."

Parent: "You thought of a very important reason! Can you think of another?"

Child: "Why are you drinking water?"

Parent: "Because I'm thirsty."

Child: "Why are you thirsty?"

Parent: "Because I ate salty peanuts."

Child: "Why did you eat salty peanuts?"

These types of questions are enough to drive you crazy! We can pull ourselves out of the endless loop of questioning by either giving the question back, "Why do you suppose I'm drinking water," or giving an acknowledging statement, "You're wondering about that."

Stop potential battles

There is another benefit to not

rushing to answer questions. It stops potential battles. A boy asked his dad, "Why do I have to go to school?" A question like this usually leads father and son into an argument. Dad was tempted to answer with a lecture, "You have to go to school. If you don't go to school, you won't have an education, and without an education, how do you expect to make a good living? You know it isn't easy getting a job these days. You better start taking your future more seriously. Are you listening to me?" Instead, dad decided not to answer immediately. He said, "Why do you think you have to go to school?" The child quickly exclaimed, "Because it's required by law," and he started doing his homework. Battle over before it began.

A learning opportunity

I present an art program at the school. Every presentation features an artist's work for the children to see and learn about. At the end of the presentation, I ask, "Would you like to know how I learned about today's artist? The kids nod their heads and wait for an answer. Instead of answering, I turn the question back to them, "Where do you think I might have learned about this artist?" Quickly the hands start raising. Immediately, I get two familiar responses: "books," and "the Internet." The hands go down.

I'll say, "There are other sources besides books and the Internet." Slowly a few hands begin to raise as the thinking becomes their responsibility. Once the kids start thinking, they come up with all kinds of creative ideas such as: "You can look through magazines." "You can watch video tapes on the artist." "You can go to a museum." "You can write to the artist." "You can use an encyclopedia." "You can get an audio tape on the artist," and "You can ask an art teacher." By having kids actively participate in thinking of the answer, they explore and retain ideas and become more open to hearing other people's ideas as well.

When is it most helpful for a parent to answer children's questions? Our answers help most after our children air their thoughts. Having shared their own ideas, they become more receptive to really hearing what we have to say. By not instantly answering children's questions, by listening with interest to their ideas on a subject, children process their thoughts, develop active minds, and contemplate solutions.

Marilyn Suttle brings skill building workshops to corporate and educational settings. E-mail her at MsSuttle@aol.com or visit her web site: <http://1member.aol.com/MsSuttle>.

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Jewish slant on hospice care

Hospice of Michigan will present *Taking the Fear Out of Hospice: a Jewish Perspective* at 7:15 p.m. Thursday, April 19 at Adat Shalom Synagogue in Farmington Hills.

Arthur Horwitz, owner and publisher of the Detroit Jewish News, will moderate a panel of experts from Hospice of Michigan, including: Dottie Deremo, president and CEO; Dr. John Finn, executive medical director; Bobbie Blitt, Jewish outreach liaison; Rabbi Bunny Freedman, spiritual care counselor; and Karen Tessler, caregiver.

"We invite people to come and learn about hospice care provided in a spirit that honors Jewish cultural and spiritual traditions," said Pola Friedman, spokeswoman for Hospice of Michigan. "Last year we formed a Jewish Advisory Committee, and this program is one of several initiatives to reach out to the community."

The program is open to the public free of charge. A dessert buffet will follow. To reserve a place or receive information, call 248-443-5900 or visit the web site: www.hom.org.

Hospice of Michigan provides compassionate care to people living with a terminal illness and support to loved ones. Every day the organization serves more than 850 people in 48 counties throughout Michigan.

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