

Folding the Laundry and Other Examples of "Being There" for our Children

By David Livingston

Schools are held together by little vignettes of tragedy and success, mixed with the comical and not-so-comical mistakes that are a part of every day. They are what make up both the intended and unintended atmosphere of each school building in America.

In some places the value of the stories isn't recognized; they don't get told; and everyone is the poorer for it. In other places, the stories that are chosen for telling all seem to have a destructive cast to them, but they get told anyway. But in the best of circumstances, the stories of an individual school add up to a heroic picture of how a group of people work with children.

However, it is only the very rare story that reaches epic proportions...a story where the message is so powerful in its *truth* that it transcends the specifics of the individuals and the school involved. What follows is one of those. I wish I could say that it happened at our school, but it didn't. It is enough for me that it really did occur in another elementary school in our district and that I know people who know the child and the parent involved...

The shoe-box diorama is due today, it's done to perfection, but instead of being at school, it is forgotten at home. Everyone of us, parent and teacher alike can picture that mid-morning phone call. It may not matter whether this is the first or the fifty-first call home from this particular child to this particular parent, the message is clear...it's going to take some mom-help to bail this kid out of today's self-inflicted jam.

Now this is one lucky child. Not only is his mom at home, but after some discussion she agrees to bring the project to school. What the child doesn't know at the instant of putting down the phone, is that his good fortune is only beginning. For, along with the forgotten project, his mom is going to bring to school a basket of unfolded laundry with a love note that says:

"Thank you for folding these clothes for me. That's what I was doing when you called me this morning to bring your shoe box. We all have responsibilities and yes, we all make mistakes—but there are always consequences. Write something down if you have trouble remembering it—I do. Smile—I love you. Mom"

I don't know about you, but I'd like to be there when this mom is inducted into the Parenting Hall of Fame. I would love to have the chance to shake her hand

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and thank her for this extraordinary example of helping a child to learn to take responsibility. I don't think I have ever been able to think so quickly on my parenting feet, but this story provides inspiration and gives me hope that, someday, I too will rise to the occasion.

The story told here happened recently, but already it is taking on a life of its own around our school district. I guess the reason it resonates with so many people is that we know too many of the other kind of being-there-for-our-kids stories. Those are the times when we do more enabling (to use the current jargon) than helping. Too often, "being there" for a child now means either protecting a child from suffering the natural consequences of childhood's bad decisions, or worse yet, defending the indefensible behavior that **every** child exhibits on occasion.

In our desire to smooth the way in the direction of growing up, we grade off the bumps in life that have the potential of teaching the most to our children. Now please don't get the wrong idea. I believe it is every parent's responsibility to protect a child from driving off a cliff. Parenting needs to include some guardrail-checking every day. But robbing a child of learning opportunities by subtracting the impacts of mistakes can make the transition to adult-sized bumps an exceedingly difficult one.

All of this has provided me with a new resolve...to look for times when my own children and the children at Peakview School can "fold the laundry". I owe them that.

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SYNONYMS FOR "SAID"

- | | | |
|------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| 1. spoke | 31. muttered | 61. claimed |
| 2. uttered | 32. praised | 62. sang |
| 3. recited | 33. denoted | 63. confessed |
| 4. asserted | 34. maintained | 64. invited |
| 5. repeated | 35. persuaded | 65. injected |
| 6. stated | 36. reported | 66. admitted |
| 7. assumed | 37. convinced | 67. preached |
| 8. indicated | 38. urged | 68. commanded |
| 9. declared | 39. proclaimed | 69. solicited |
| 10. expressed | 40. narrated | 70. delivered |
| 11. announced | 41. estimated | 71. babbled |
| 12. communicated | 42. reiterated | 72. ordered |
| 13. mentioned | 43. described | 73. exaggerated |
| 14. emphasized | 44. explained | 74. notified |
| 15. advised | 45. requested | 75. acquainted |
| 16. advertised | 46. discussed | 76. overstated |
| 17. recorded | 47. predicted | 77. chatted |
| 18. appealed | 48. interpreted | 78. prattled |
| 19. authorized | 49. accounted | 79. conferred |
| 20. complained | 50. suggested | 80. threw |
| 21. forced | 51. told | 81. observed |
| 22. objected | 52. asked | 82. continued |
| 23. confirmed | 53. ejaculated | 83. distinguished |
| 24. accused | 54. inquired | 84. appraised |
| 25. influenced | 55. gossiped | 85. insulted |
| 26. retorted | 56. conversed | 86. required |
| 27. required | 57. informed | 87. murmured |
| 28. bid | 58. talked | 88. spread |
| 29. directed | 59. expounded | 89. worshiped |
| 30. argued | 60. elucidated | 90. gabbed |
| | | 91. tattled |

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