

Being Present in the Moment

Catherine Nelson, Ph.D.

One of my favorite summer activities is kayaking on rivers and streams. When I am in my kayak in the water moving along, I feel the currents; I smell the water; and I watch the water move over and around the rocks. I see the ducks and geese on the water and the wildlife along the moving shoreline. There is no future and no past. I am totally present in the moment.

A friend recently told me about an enjoyable experience he had with his wife last Sunday. They went to their favorite coffee shop and sat outside enjoying the warm sun of their bodies. They savored the rich aroma of their different coffee flavors and they talked about a book they had both read. He said they sat there for almost two hours relaxing, sharing, and feeling the richness of their time together with each other.

Let me share one other story.

I was in a big box store a few weeks ago shopping. I noticed a woman in her mid twenties on her cell phone with two little girls each standing on one side of the cart. About an hour later I arrived at the checkout and I saw the same woman on her cell phone with the two girls also checking out. Once she got her receipt, she interrupted her conversation to ask the girls what kind of soda they would like to drink. As soon as she ordered the sodas she went back to her cell phone conversation. She left the store still talking on her cell phone and each girl had a soda in her hand.

Was she on the cell phone the whole time she was in the store? Did the girls ever talk to each other? I don't know; however, when I looked at the expression of boredom and emptiness of the girls' faces, I felt sorry for them. Where was the contact? Children learn from adults about how to be or not be in relationship. What they learn from family members often becomes a habit later in their adult lives.

Our ability to be present in the moment with our self and with others sometimes feels like an ongoing struggle. We are very busy in our lives. We have much to do and much to take care of each day. We have lots of electronic devices and software that provide information and communication but without mindfulness, it can easily pull us away from our connection with our self and each other.

Why does being present in the moment matter? As humans we all long for authentic contact with those whom we love. Even our animals long for authentic contact. We all want to be



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received, listened to, touched and supported emotionally. We want to share happy moments, successes, and even surprises with those who matter to us.

When we don't take the time it takes to schedule a "time out" for our self, then we are neglecting our own emotional and spiritual wellbeing. The woman who decides to take a "time out" on a summer morning to sit for a while with her dog under a big old tree listening to the sounds of summer is practicing self-care. The man who goes fishing along a river may be nourishing his whole being. These two people will be more rested and able to be present with others.

When we don't take the time it takes to be present with someone we love and care about, we lose precious opportunities to sustain the relationship. If you believe that we are all part of a whole that is much greater than anyone of us, then seeking genuine contact and being present in the moment with oneself and with another is as essential as breathing. There is great natural beauty around us and within us. There is richness to the silence within us and the silence around us. When we choose to be present in the moment in nature, or within our self, and, or with another, we will experience a depth of contact that will touch the soul.

I saw a quote recently that went something like this: "Life is like a coin. You can spend it any way you want, but once you spend it, it's gone forever." What are you doing with your "coin"? ■

4 Tips for Present-Moment Parenting

1. Make time to have family meals together! Start your day together over breakfast! Notice how nice it is without planning your busy day in your mind. Notice what you really have to be grateful for.
2. Turn off technology when you are with your kids and ask them to do the same. Our technology is amazing and very useful, but it tends to drive a wedge in connecting and communicating with our kids.
3. Shift your focus from what might be wrong or a problem and trying to fix it to focusing on what is right and creating more of it. Be mindful of the things your kids say and do that display the wonderful people they are.
4. Don't be afraid to say "thank you" to your kids. And really mean it! Let them know how grateful you are to them for being your amazing child and how grateful you are to "be" their parents.

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