

Leaving Your Mark

By Becky Kavanagh

The Chinese have a saying, "Every child is a piece of paper and every person leaves a mark." What kind of mark are you leaving? A masterpiece, rich in color and depth? A mural, full of action? As nannies, we have the unique opportunity to observe children with many of the first in their lives-steps, words, friendships, etc... How can we positively impact the children in our care? How can we leave a good mark?

ROLE MODELS

Think back to the role models in your own life-as a child, a teenager, or an adult. The commonality for all role models centers on the feeling they gave you that, "if they can do that, then I can do that!" Modeling the behaviors of others can strengthen our self-worth and self-respect. In turn we can see worthiness in others and respect their individuality. Each day we are modeling for the children in our care. Each day we should be thoughtful about exactly what we are modeling.

RELATIONSHIPS

Connections with others are essential for human existence and growth. Hugs, laughs, kisses, snuggles, smiles, winks, holding and being held, looking face to face, talking-children need these connections, we need those connections. Unfortunately, there is a real threat to relationships in our society today. Disconnection is the enemy to healthy, strong relationships. I found the following facts startling. The average American will spend seven years of their life watching television and 66% of American families spend their dinnertime watching television. We need to practice enjoying each other and building relationships among ourselves and with our children. Try spending more time talking, sharing, laughing, reading, singing and touching.

RITUALS

Why do children love rituals so much? Why do any of us? They are our roots and heritage, giving our lives meaning and depth. Rituals don't have to be saved for special occasions or holidays, they can be celebrated daily. When the children I care for were small, we had a "movie night" ritual at least once a month. There were special foods, crazy Becky acting, a fun movie with snuggling on the couch. While it didn't really matter what we saw, the preparation and the ritual activity itself definitely mattered. Maybe you have a ritual around rest time or what you do while riding in the car to preschool. Mealtimes can have their own ritual as well as your arrival and departure times. Passing along your family traditions or supporting your employer's traditions gives the children a sense of heritage and belonging.

Making a mark in a child's life is focused on building memories. So I ask again-what mark are you leaving?

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