

Web-Based Radio Show

The Ten Traits that Parents want most for their Children:

Discussion of relating to others, caring and empathy, and curiosity


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Good morning and welcome to our Web-Based Radio Show. Thank you for joining us today.

Today we have a very interesting show where we are really going to focus on one theme, but a variety of topics. We are going to talk about the ten traits that parents want most for their children. This is independent of whether the children have special needs, learning challenges, behavioral challenges, or are growing up without any obvious challenges. In a sense, accomplishing these ten characteristics, or mastering them, can be thought of as a challenge for all children. Now it may be a little tougher with some children than others, depending on their biology or depending on the environments that they are born into. But, as you'll see as we go through these, the mastery of these different capacities; these different traits, really involves understanding the child's biology, understanding how each child has a unique nervous system, and then creating a learning environment, i.e., a family environment and then later on a school environment that harnesses these qualities and traits. They all have their own special, what we call, developmental pathway. They all have their own special way of coming into being. We are not born with these traits, but they must be learned. We create the learning environments. We do that, again, by figuring out how the child's nervous system works – what they are born with, how their development is occurring, and then how to give them the experiences that challenge them to develop these capacities.


So let's jump in, because we have a lot of material to cover. Serena Wieder, our partner in these shows is going to be joining us shortly. I'll describe the trait and some of the ways in which caregivers can promote this trait, and then Serena will join in and add on some further thoughts to it.



Just to give you a sense of the breadth and width of what we are talking about, we are going to be talking about relating to others, caring and empathy, curiosity, communication, having emotional balance and stability and yet a large emotional range, self awareness and self acceptance and self esteem, the capacity for discipline, having vision and creativity, and being a good logical thinker and also having ethical and moral integrity. So these are certainly traits that maybe you would add, as a parent or clinician, one or two others on to, or take one or two of these away, but I think that most people would agree that these are the essentials of what we want for healthy children and healthy adults. We are only going to highlight here, because many of these we have talked about in different ways before, but not quite as systematically. So for each trait, for each capacity, we are going to highlight a few of the essentials that cross all the ages. So we aren't going to break this down by the first year of life, second year, third year, etc. We are going to say, "Here are some of the things you need to be doing at all the ages up through adolescence and even adulthood to promote this trait."

The first one that we will talk about is the basic one that we talk a lot about on this show, ***Relating to Others***. How do you help a child and an adult read and relate to a whole range of people, make friends and form relationships easily with peers, later on with colleagues or extended family members or business clients, etc.? How do you especially foster this capacity for intimacy with family members? With the child's own family, as an adult with the family you are hopefully going to bring into the world? How do we promote relating?

We know "nobody is an island" and no one operates alone, although some people prefer to be alone. We often have an assumption that some children just prefer being on their own, playing computer games, or children who are withdrawn or self absorbed, or children with special needs conditions such as autism. There has been an assumption that being alone is easier or preferred or better. But, quite to the contrary. I would say that the most fundamental human need right after food and health, is for relationships. But that if a child doesn't show this need or this desire, it isn't because they don't want it down deep, I have never met a child who doesn't want to be a part of a relationship, however withdrawn or self absorbed or ever severe their special needs condition including the most severe forms of autism, I've never met a child who didn't want to be part of a relationship. What I do see are children who have a hard time finding a comfortable and pleasurable way of being in a relationship – negotiating that relationship.




So the key thing about fostering relationships, here are the key points to remember:

1. You have got to know the child and know what is going to bring that child pleasure. Relationships get learned because they are experienced by children at any age, as pleasurable; as fun. So you look for the gleam in the eye, you look for the big smile in the baby, you look for the enjoyable interaction in the school-aged child. You look for the great conversations that are meaningful and personal with the teenager. You look for that special intimacy with the young adult who is learning to negotiate more intimate relationships. But the key is to create pleasurable experiences. To do that, you have to know that there are two subpoints:

a. You have got to know how the person's nervous system works. Are they sensitive to things like touch and sound, in which case overwhelming them with a lot of touch or loud noises is not going to help them want to have a relationship with you. On the other hand, being extra soothing and comforting and soft with the person will. Or are they a person who craves a lot of movement and a lot of activity, in which case running around and jumping with them, doing sports or dance is going to make you their best buddy. They are going to want to have that relationship with you. So you have to know how that other person's nervous works, and what will be pleasurable.

b. You have to know what their interests are. Are they interested in that red ball or the green doggy or are they interested in computer games or are they interested in sports or dance? Or, are they interested in talking about business?


2. Join the person in their natural interests. This is a fundamental principle of Floortime. Follow the other individual's lead. So this is a ubiquitous principle throughout life. That is our second principle. Follow the person's interest. Discover what they are. Build on them. Become a part of those interests. So when it has been said, for example, that children with special needs such as autism, prefer objects to people and want to play with their blue car or their red car or line up their cars rather than relate to mommy and daddy, that is not entirely true. What we have shown repeatedly is if we become a part of that car, if we put the car on our head or in our mouth or on our shoulder, pretty soon the child is relating to us and the car together. Pretty soon he discovers that we are more interesting than the car as we go, "beep-beep" and we get on all fours with the car on our back. Pretty soon he is racing with us or lining us up, not the car up. Pretty soon there is a relationship forming. Find out the



child's interests. Join those interests. Become a part of them. Don't force the child to compete. The reason why the child may be tuning the human out and focusing on the inanimate object is because it is a little easier to manipulate, to get it to do what you want it to do. It is a poor second choice for the child, not a preferred choice. So that is the second principle about relationships. Find those interests, and join those interests.

3. The third principle about relating to others, is to expand the child's relationship capacities. Build the emotional range of experiences into them. So for example, once you have that relationship cooking, the next principle is expand the activities you do in that relationship. So are you doing just moving cars? See if you can expand it into pretend play with the young child. The child who just plays computer games, can you go outside and do sports or do some other activity? Can you interest that child in chess or drama? Can you expand the activities and the range?

4. The next principle is a very, very important one. Can you expand the relationships themselves? If the child forms a relationship with the parent – can we expand that to peer relationships? Or if the child relates to peers but only same sex peers, but it is a teenager – can you get the child to relate to opposite sex peers? You have a young adult who is comfortable with work relationships but has no close friends. Can you start expanding that relationship capacity to the intimacy of after-work life? Obviously, for many children that is hard, where they relate closely to adults but not well to peers, where they find that difficult. Here the principle of expanding the relationship patterns into all the age-expected range – peers, same sex, opposite sex peers, different types of adults for the young adult. Here the key principle is to be gradual, build on what the child is already comfortable with – if the child is comfortable with one particular friend, maybe you can get them used to another friend by having them both over to the house together so the security of having little Adam over enhances the security in having Stephanie over too. The child gradually gets used to Stephanie. Or you do an activity that the child is very comfortable with and very familiar with – going to a place the child knows very well and inviting a new child with the child, with a lot of support. Even an adult who is trying to expand their friendship networks – we see adults do this naturally. They will operate in groups and then add one more person onto the group. Or how do boys and girls meet each other initially? It is only rare that opposite sex relationships start forming by themselves. Rather what happens more likely is a group of guys and a group of girls begin getting together, each having a comfort of relating to the same sex peers in the group. Then you begin seeing little




overtures; little forays from the group to the group – little flirtatious glances, it starts off, often, with in 7 or 8 year olds by chasing each other in the playground, group to group. Then by the teen years, they begin hanging out, maybe going to dances together or hanging out at the mall together as a group. Then you begin gradually seeing pairing off with gradual more intimacy. So teenagers and younger children often do this for themselves. But for those who can't, this is where parents often come in handy. So for the younger child who is not moving on into peers, start with a comfortable situation. Maybe they are comfortable with a sibling and then use that to expand into a peer relationship. So expand gradually. Expand those relationships gradually.

5. The next principle is practice, practice, practice. The harder it is for a child, for example, to have peer relationships, or relate to a wide range of others, the more practice a child needs. So we always recommend 4-5 play dates a week for children, and sometimes 7. There is no harm in having two a day. But do it gradually, and get up to a high level so you are practicing what is hard for you. The more you practice it, the more comfortable it becomes.

6. The last principle we'll talk about in terms of relating to others and relationships, is help the individual build greater intimacy. The hardest part for many adults is to build those intimate relationships that are sustaining. We see so many adults who are capable of relationships, but only superficial ones. As soon as the going gets rough, as soon as there are conflicts, or as soon as "he isn't playing with the toy my way," or "she isn't sensitive enough to my needs," that the relationship is given up. So in order to develop intimacy, you have to help the individual not give in to their favorite escapist or avoidant patterns when there is a feeling in that relationship that is a little bit hard, whether it's anger, or resentment, or annoyance, or too much closeness. Help the child negotiate over the hurdles and hang in there. Not with everyone, there will be certain people who are not well suited for a relationship, but at least a few of them. So help sustain the intimacy by providing support to hang in there, because that is the only way that intimacy develops.


Now what I want to do is turn it over to my colleague, Serena Wieder, to see if she wants to amplify on a few of these points. Serena?

SW: Hi, good morning. I did just join you. I think I got most of what you said. I think perhaps, let me go in reverse just picking up on your last point about the more practices and more experience. I like to use the concept of helping, at least with young



children but this true with older people as well, that our role is in mediating these relationships. That what we want children to practice, we may start off giving them more support by planning ahead with some of the things they like, what are some of the things their friends might like, by supporting the child being able to kind of negotiate things and being a partner to the child, especially if the child needs support playing the kinds of things their friend likes to play. It's important to kind of be in there because you are both modeling and supporting, you are being like the other kid that you want your child to play with. You can do that and practice being a friend in the Floortime model very, very easily, because you are both a player and you are also the mommy or daddy, kind of helping the child think through the next steps or figure out the motives. You can also do that in a play date. Some children need more support, especially if they are more sensitive, or if they tend to be a little bit more "shy" or not quite too sure what to do next. So it is ok to do some planning and to be a partner. The one thing I think it is also very important when you start out helping children develop some of these capacities, is to really be in there with them, which often might mean offering another family chance to "hey, what if you drop your child off and we'll play while you go shopping" and I know parents will often tell me that it is very hard to support their children learn to relate to other kids because the parent is also there. They worry about what the parents will think or they feel they have to talk to the other parent while the kids are playing, and you want to figure out what works best for your child in providing this level of support. Most of all you will see that we have offered and encouraged relationships by being and offering the relationship you want. In other words, being a model for the child's relationship, how to do the social entry, how you kind of join a group, how do you say "hi" or what do you do when you leave. This kind of modeling very, very important. It's not always automatic. For some children, it is. I was just at Central Park yesterday and watching children play in this little playground and the sprinklers were on and it was, of course, 90°, and it was amazing to see how many children go over to other children spontaneously and how many children don't. So we have to appreciate those individual differences. We don't always have wait so much, but to woo and entice and have those things that are just so much fun that they are hard to resist. That goes for all levels and all ages, that if we don't have some of that fun in the interaction, then it is just that much harder to jump in and live it.


I think the other principles and the order in which you spelled them out is really how this develops. And, it is development, it is an evolving, developing, and emerging capacity, and it's never too late. We can start when the child is 2 or 5 or 10. It is



important to keep these principles in mind at any age when you move into trying to help a child strengthen these capacities.

SG: Thank you, Serena. The next trait we are going to talk about is **Caring and Empathy**. Empathy is one of the traits that are the hardest for children. Every parent, whether it's a child without challenges or with challenges wants their children to be more empathetic, to be nicer to other parents, to be nicer to their parents, to be nicer to their grandparents, to understand how other people feel. Parents are often somewhat confused, "How can Johnny or Susie be so mean to their sibling? Don't they realize how their sibling feels?" What is often not known is that empathy, like other capacities, grows and develops. It requires both emotional and intellectual confidence, because it is a complicated act. You have to put yourself in someone else's shoes, understand how you feel, understand how you would feel if you were in their shoes – that is a complicated, cognitive, and emotional task. Then, even more than just simply understanding what you would feel in their shoes, you have to care about that because you could understand it, and then use it manipulatively and say, "Oh, that's fine, I'm glad so-and-so is upset, I want to make him upset." So you have to care about having other people feel good to use that ability, to put yourself in someone else's shoes and to really demonstrate true empathy. Now how do we promote this as parents?


1. The first step is to recognize that empathy doesn't come from lecturing. Just telling a child to be caring, to be thoughtful – he may do it in front of you just to not get you yelling at him. But empathy from the inside, as a true experience, only comes from being empathized with. So principle one is, empathy comes from being empathized with. In other words, you don't even know what it is until you have felt it yourself. It is one of those experiences that you have to feel it to know it and to want to do it for others. So the first step in empathy is to empathize with the child. That means, as a parent, we have to empathize with how they are feeling. Telling them how they should feel – you shouldn't be so angry, or you should be thankful for what I'm doing for you, or where is that smile on your face – that is not empathy. Empathy is, "Oh, I can tell you are feeling how?" or "You don't look like a happy camper today." "No, I'm not, mommy, I'm feeling very sad and dejected, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah..." That is empathy. Empathy is tuning in to your child's feeling, trying to help them articulate, if they are verbal, what they are feeling. If not, just mirroring and mimicking their facial expression creates that empathetic resonance with them. That is the first step, is helping a child feel empathized with.



2. The second step in learning about empathy is to help the child, after they experience what empathy feels like, is to be able to be aware of their own feelings. Because, unless you are aware of your own feelings, you can't be aware of other people's feelings. So here it means helping the child experience and express a range of feelings through the way you interact, not shying away from assertiveness or curiosity or even anger, as well as love and warmth and dependency, and then helping the child express that in pretend play, later on in words, later on in reality conversations doing what we call the "Thinking about Tomorrow" game, "How are you going to feel if this happens?"


3. The third step is helping the child appreciate the feelings of others. That comes again, with the verbal child, asking "What do you think Susie or Johnny feels?" Not just, "You shouldn't do that because it will make Johnny feel bad." "How do you think Johnny feels?" "Well, I think Johnny likes it when I hit him." "Well, why do you think Johnny likes it when you hit him?" "Well, because he knows that he is one of the gang and we all hit each other." And you know what? Your child may be correct. Johnny might like it if it makes him feel like one of the gang. On the other hand, you can then raise the question, "Do you think he likes being one of the gang or he likes having his arm hit?" "Well, I don't think he likes having his arm hit, but he likes being one of the gang." "Well, are there other ways you can have him be one of the gang without having his arm hit?" "Well, I guess I could pass him the ball when we are playing soccer, but that wouldn't be as much fun for me as hitting him in the arm."

But helping the child tune in to how the other person is likely to feel, which is only possible once a child can identify his own feelings, is verbal about those feelings, and can begin putting himself in someone else's shoes, and that usually isn't going to happen until at least ages 4-7. It doesn't really get developed until ages 9-14 to any significant degree, but you can get started on it early. Even preverbally, you can show the child how someone else is feeling when you are playing with the child by showing them the facial expression. So the child is mean to mommy or pushes the toy away from mommy, and mommy can show a real big exaggerated face with a real sad look or a real exasperated look, and say, "Mmmmm..." and the child sees the feeling in mommy, but doesn't experience it verbally but actually experiences it because of a slightly dramatic and exaggerated response on mommy's or daddy's part. So being interactive and somewhat animated in your facial expressions as well as in your vocalizations gives the child the experience of your feelings. So basically, the second step is to help the



child understand the feelings of others, first preverbally through animated facial expressions and vocalizations as part of back-and-forth, two-way communication, and then secondly through acts when the child becomes verbal, having the child play it out in pretend play, having him play different roles, “Well, what is the dolly feeling now?” And then third, having the child actually telling you how he thinks little Susie or Johnny feels, or how a sibling feels, or how he thinks mommy feels, without putting all the baggage with it, without saying “You’re bad for making the child feel this way.” Because if you do that, the child won’t want to tell you what he thinks. The child may say, “Well he feels mad and I want him to feel mad.” For starters, you’ll hope the child changes that, doesn’t want to get other people angry, but initially, at least you are helping the child understand how the other person feels, and he is motivated to tell you at this point. So that is the third step.


4. The fourth step in empathy is having the child care about how the other person feels and taking an interest in the other person where they use their own feelings, how they like to feel, as a standard for their behavior. Again, that doesn’t occur, even under optimal development, until about ages 8-10 and beyond, where the child actually learns to operate in two worlds, where they can have internal standards for themselves that they can begin applying to others. When we see 7 year olds being surprisingly mean to another child, like I was at the swimming pool the other day in my own neighborhood, and I saw this child around age 7 playing with Child A and Child B comes over eager to join them, and says, “Oh, can I play?” and the first child says, “No, I’m playing with Jonathon” and gives him the most cold shoulder, and this third child just says, “Oh, where’s Jonathon?” as though to distrust him thinking of getting the brush-off, and he points to Jonathon swimming to get the ball that the first child just threw over there, and he says, “Ok, bye!” and swims off. Well, I thought it was the most heartless and cruel thing that I could imagine and yet these kids did it like it was an everyday occurrence like “Where’s the butter?” “The butter is right here.” I remember from my own childhood such experiences were not unusual, and I remember from when my own kids were growing up. But it also reminded me that at this age, that children don’t yet put themselves in someone else’s shoes. Often some of the children are quite rigid in playing with so-and-so and that’s all I can do right now, and they could be very nice to that same child who came over, and hour later, and very eager to play with him. That other child, when he left and said, “Bye!” acted that that was quite the possibility. He didn’t seem to take it with deep, personal injury. We know that children who are



constantly rejected are going to certainly not be happy campers, but it reminds us that this is a developmental continuum.

So the fourth aspect of empathy is helping the child care about how other people feel and using their own standards for themselves for other people. So after you ask the child how he thinks others feel, and after you have played out both sides of a feeling in pretend play, and after you have been a very animated interactive partner with the child, you can give the child that gift of having concern for others by how you, as the adult, have concern for the child. Here is where it is important to show concern for your child's feelings, with the full range of feelings. So if your concern with caring feelings but also curious feelings, but also assertive feelings, but also desires for independence, also aggression at times, also the need for discipline by setting firm limits – so if you show concern for all the child's feelings, because the child will appreciate when you set limits and are disciplined with the child when they are needed because they realize at some level, they can't do it for themselves, even though they will fight you on it. So as you show concern for your child in all those domains, the child uses that experience to be able to show concern for others. Then when you begin raising verbally the moral standard, "Well, how would you feel if someone did that to you?" the child can relate to that. The child doesn't say, "Well, I don't care, it's not me, it's them." The child will care because they have had your compassion. So that is how you get the child caring for the other child.

5. Then the last step we'll talk about for empathy is to help the child constantly expand their empathetic range by having them experience more situations, more feelings themselves, helping them experience the world in it's full complexity, and also helping them use their imagination to stretch beyond what they actually experience, to talk about what it might be like growing up in a country where children don't have food, or in a country where there aren't a lot of human rights, or in a place where there is a lot of prejudice and bias, and expanding through their imagination, through their reading, through building on experiences they have a little bit, what these experiences of others in the world are like. That's the way we expand the emotional range. Obviously, there are kids who are not capable of those kinds of discussions until they are teenagers, but that goes on throughout the adolescent and adult years. So that's the last step I want to emphasize in terms of empathy building, to broaden that range way beyond our own experiences, where we have to use imagination and knowledge through reading.




Serena, do you want to add on a few thoughts?

SW: Yes, I think it's very important to recognize that often children will become very anxious about this expanding range. Whether they show this anxiety by avoiding certain feelings, insisting that everything is good or everyone is happy and not wanting to play with the bad guys and not wanting to be a bad guy, what we are picking up here is the developmental process of children becoming more aware of this wider range of emotion and yet not comfortable with it. Children need lots of time to expand and to practice playing these emotions and you can pay attention to not only the emotion the child is trying to understand like jealousy or anger or competition or being a tyrant, or often children will pick figures even from history to try to be the very thing they are trying to understand. It may appear mean or controlling in their play, but it is their way of practicing. They are putting themselves into these shoes. It's important to recognize that anxiety, because we have to be very empathic to both support the child as he tries to understand this, and explore the different alternatives to these feelings and what they might mean.

Similarly, pay attention to the children who never go to these negative emotions that are much more challenging and try to think safely, do it in Floortime or in pretend play or while reading a book, and get the child to explore some of these feelings. This is where we can help children be a little bit more empathic in safety. It's not happening in a kind of real way, and then when things do come up in the real way, like feeling rejected or "I'm not going to be your friend anymore" experience, you are going to explore it more in the talk time.

But don't rush into solutions for your child when they struggle with these negative emotions and be aware of the anxiety and help them kind of think it through and feel it more safely. This will help them take the risks they need to go there.

Related to this point is you will find there are some children who actually take on the negative emotions more intensely because they are kind of jumping into the fire and into the frying pan. They show what we call "counter phobic tendencies." They are very scared of the aggression, so they are going to be the aggressive one so someone doesn't act aggressively towards them. So if they are afraid of being rejected, they might be more rejecting. This is another way of really reading your child's feelings and helping them understand how their behavior reflects their feelings. They are going to need your feedback and your empathy and your response to really expand this emotional range, so




there is empathy across this broader picture. One of the things we do know is that there is no risk in talking or playing. Here I think parents really have to pay attention to how they feel. If they have that full range of empathy themselves, or do they get a little anxious or uncomfortable if they see their child trying to be aggressive or if they see their child being mean and quickly shut it down. That brings us back to how to support this empathy building up.

The only other small point I think that might be helpful which I find when we work with very young children is to see another form of empathy which is prediction. If someone predicts, “Oh, what is mommy going to say?” or “What will daddy think?” or “What do you think your sister will do?” it’s another way of helping the child put themselves in someone else’s shoes and anticipate other people’s feelings and using that empathic process to both anticipate or preempt or learn to think of someone else’s motives and thereby have a better foundation for understanding someone else and then seeing if they want to or can empathize with it. This takes lots and lots of practice, but you will see the child showing the initial capacities, very often, just when... if I think about the first feelings children empathize with, it’s often when the parent might pretend to be crying with their doll and you’ll see the baby or young child come over very quickly to comfort because they are going to show what they experience – your comfort. But when it comes to some of these negative feelings, they don’t often experience, I think we need to work a little harder to help children develop this wider range. I think that’s it!

SG: Thank you, Serena.

The next trait we are going to talk about is **Curiosity** - the desire to absorb as much as possible about a given topic, and to explore new territories and new terrains. How do we stir curiosity in children or adults, and how do we help all children – those with special needs and those without special needs become more curious about all facets of their world? Here, the principles are somewhat straightforward.

1. The first principle of curiosity is to not do to the child, instead challenge the child or the adult to do to you. In challenging the other to do to you rather than doing for them or to them, you are stirring up their assertiveness and their curiosity. In other words, let’s say a concrete example of a baby, you can put the little toy rattle in the baby’s hand and then move the baby’s hand for them and shake it and hope they will shake it on their own, or you can shake that rattle and have a big smile and have it make



noise, and then hold it up and tease them and say, “You want it? You want it? I know you want to do it! I know you want it!” Often that 9 month old baby will reach out, grab that little rattle and start shaking it and have a big smile on her face. Well, that’s the first glimmer of curiosity – getting the child to do to you rather than you doing to the child.

With a 4 year old, instead of showing them how to move the car into the garage and then move the car towards the schoolhouse, and imitate your pretend play, if the child is moving the car and you can become a policeman who says, “You can’t enter this street!” And now the child has to assert themselves and become curious about what other options are open to them. They have to generate something new on themselves. They have to maybe take the car into the schoolhouse or take the car on a road trip somewhere.

With the 9 year old, who is doing the same game over and over again, if you bring that child into a new surrounding and act dumb and help the child teach you or teach you how to play a new computer game that you are both ignorant of, you are stirring that child’s curiosity.

For adults, too, creating experiences where the adult has to do the doing, has to be the leader, has to take you and teach you how to negotiate uncharted territory. That’s the way you get a curious person, where they are taking charge, where they are moving ahead and not just following. Curiosity, no matter how big the range of interest, if it is doing to the person, it’s not real curiosity. Real curiosity comes from the inside; from being challenged, to explore new territories. So the first principle is getting the person to do to you, or do to the thing, rather than you doing to the person.

2. The second principle is expanding the interactions, the activities, and the experiences. Under this, we really have a number of subprinciples:


- a. Expand and challenge a child to do more things visually
- b. more things with sound,
- c. more things with smell,
- d. more things with touch,
- e. more things with movement,

- f. more things with social interaction,
- g. new emotions that they don't like to show.

So, in pretend play, challenge the child towards assertiveness and conflict if they avoid that. If they avoid intimacy, challenge the child with a little dolly who needs a little doctor to take care of them, or a little dolly who is lonely. Challenge the child into new territory. The child who avoids motor based play – create barriers and obstacle courses. So challenge the child to constantly expand into new territory, both emotionally and physically in terms of all their modalities. That increases curiosity because the child is always exploring new experiences.

3. Help the child over their fears of being curious. One of the biggest detriments to curiosity is the anxiety or fear, where we avoid, where we play ostrich, where we pretend new experiences aren't there because they are a little scary for us. Whether it's expanding our peer play dates, whether it's expanding into a new game, whether it's studying something we haven't studied before at school, whether it's getting curious about the human body during puberty or the teen years and learning about boy/girl differences, if one hasn't learned already, whether it's becoming curious about the larger world – what goes on in other countries. So many people are narrow and concerned with only their day-to-day existence. How do we expand them to become interested in what is going on in Asia and Africa and the Middle East? How do we expand that curiosity? The way to do it is you tie it to something of immediate interest to them. You come back to our principle that we had before. Where do they live everyday? So the person who is very concerned about their cars and only their cars, you create the bridge. You begin wondering whether there is going to be enough gasoline for them to continue to drive their car. They may ask, "Well, why do you worry about gasoline?" "Well, because of what is going on in the Middle East, where we get big amount of our oil, which we make gasoline from." "Well, what is happening in the Middle East?" Now all of a sudden you have their interest because this may affect their car. So you have to find a way of challenging the expanding interest by building on the interest of the person. You have to expand, expand, expand the person into new territory and new terrains.


4. The last principle that I will emphasize in terms of curiosity is helping the person experience the pleasures of curiosity. Help them experience the joys of curiosity, the joys of discovery. This comes from combining the first principle – getting



the person to do to you rather than you doing to the person, with the pleasure of success. So with a young child or with any age, set up the challenge so that the person is successful 70-80% of the time. If it is mastering a new athletic feat, or mastering a new area of intellectual pursuit, or becoming an artist, or learning about music, or becoming interested in the world at large, set it up in such a way that the person feels they can master the new area somewhat successfully. In other words, don't set it up that it is a challenge that they feel they can only meet 20% of the time or is hard to have any rewards or success with. Set it up so it is 70-80% successful. Let's say you are trying to stir curiosity about different languages to the person who has a tin ear. Well, if you give him a word that is hard to repeat, and you build on their interest, and you have a teenager who is going to visit France and you tell him some phrases to meet young boys or young girls depending on the teenager, they will be interested in that. If you give him a phrase that is too hard for them to memorize and they can't be successful, they will give it up quickly and say "Oh, I'll just hang out with Americans." But if you give him two-word phrases that he can master 80% of the time easily, he'll probably get interested in French or Spanish or whatever the language is of the country they are going to go to. So that is the other principle. Tie it to their natural interests, expand gradually, and help them be successful 70-80% of the time.

Serena, do you want to add on a few thoughts?

SW: I just want to really highlight one thing. To really appreciate that some children are just so sensitive to their environments, whether it's sounds, movements, the unexpectedness of things – they will often retreat and be less curious because there is a kind of risk for them going out there. Since there are so many unpredictable experiences in life and certainly unpredictable sensations in life, it's very important to bring this affect of, "Oh! That's a surprise! I wasn't expecting that!" Get children away from quickly handling some of these unexpected reactions that they may have, the kind of reactivity that may otherwise make them retreat. So a fire siren could be very jarring. You're not going to be interested in where they are going or what equipment they are carrying, and instead you'll cringe. On the other hand, it could be, "Wow! Where did that come from? That was a surprise! I wonder where they are going?" So the affect you bring to help the children become less sensory defensive will help really create the opportunity for them to have the success for being more curious. As you were saying, we have to kind of create the conditions for success wherever possible, but some of that




just comes from our own attitudes and what we convey when we see a child being very cautious or too guarded or too careful about exploration.

SG: Thank you, Serena.

Our next one has to do with **Communication** and how to be a good listener, but also be a good speaker, be able to express ideas clearly, openly, and well. So communication is a two-way street, but we know it begins way before words, with communicating with gestures. How to be a communicator at all stages of life, first with gestures, then with words, a listener as well as an explainer, as a teenager or adult how to be a debater, how to communicate with ideas to others in a business or as a scientist. So this is no easy feat to become a great communicator. We know that presidential elections are won or lost by how well our candidates communicate. In many respects, the world is held together by a few great communicators who provide the glue that others can organize around. So how do we keep this skill? How do we help children become great communicators? Here too there are some key principles that cross all the ages that we can focus on.


1. One is that to communicate, to listen as well as explain, you have to be part of a two-way, interactive relationship. Communication is people-oriented. It's not memorized scripts. It is being able to think on your feet. Communication involves the ability to read and respond to what the other person is doing, thinking, and saying, and using your own ideas in relationship to the other person's gestures, thoughts, and spoken words. So that means lots of practice in two-way interactions. The first principle is to become a communicator, communicate. That means creating experiences for your child with a lot of back-and-forth communication, or for anybody. That means long conversations. This begins, again, in the preschool years and infancy years with just back-and-forth gesturing – pointing, showing. But long ones that last 10-15-20 minutes as the child is trying to take you to an area to find a toy. With preschool that means pretend play. With an early school age child, it means long conversations. Parents will often say that he doesn't want to talk about school. I'll come to that in a second. But, the first principle is long conversations at any age. With your teenager, too – long conversations about girls, about cars, about music. So to be a communicator means to communicate. It sounds simple, it sounds redundant almost, but often we want our kids to become great communicators and we don't communicate with them. So the first principle is, if you want to be a great communicator, communicate. And communicate with your children which means listening to your children and getting them to talk 60-



70% of the time. Teaching your children to communicate isn't being a lecturer. It's getting them to communicate back to you, and it has to be a real two-way street. That's the first principle.

2. The second principle is, how to do that. It comes back to our old friend, build on the child's natural interests. All children will communicate about what they are interested in. They want their rattle, if you hold it up, they'll gesture and point or reach or do something to communicate that they want that rattle if they can see it. If they are hungry and you hold the food up in front of them, they'll start communicating around the food. If they want particular kinds of toys, if they want to play a certain kind of game and you give them the facial expressions indicating that that kind of game is available. Later in life, it may be to talk about an area of favorite interest. It could be computers, it could be a movie, it could be a TV show. Later on, it might be about an academic subject, or it might be about getting a car or it might be about a new bicycle. It might be, for an adult, about their work or about a hobby. So to communicate, the second principle is to build on the other person's interests and get the two-way communication going.


3. The third principle in communication, because we want to be able to listen and understand, as well as to be able to express, is to focus on both sides of that equation – the listening and the expressing. So make the communication truly a two-way street. Don't simply be lecturing. But also, don't simply empathize and repeat what the other person is saying, getting them to go on and on and on, as though it is a one-way conversation. So frequently, whether it is with gesturing or with words, we may have people who play "therapist" with children and basically are saying, "Tell me more about that. Oh, so you had a good day at school, made you happy, well what are the things that made you so happy? Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." "Well, tell me more about the 'Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah' and tell me more about that." Well that's not a very demanding conversation for a child. It does teach a child to talk, to express their wishes and needs, if you can get a child's feelings, it might be very good for empathy but may not facilitate really two-way communication. On the other hand, lecturing the child, "Well, I hope you had a good time at school, I hope you did this, that, and the other thing" is also not going to be teaching two-way communication skills. So true two-way communication is starting off with the child's natural interests, something that they enjoyed at school or a game or computer game or a movie or a friend, etc., and then building on it, but giving them something to chew on of your own. "Gee, that reminds



me of a little friend I had who one time stole my soccer ball and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah..." "Oh really?" And then see if the child is digesting what you are saying. If they are not and just going on telling their story about what happened in school, say, "Wait a second, wait a second, what did you think about what I just told you about what happened to me when I was a kid that was something similar? How does that compare to what you were telling me about your schoolmate taking your soccer ball?" Challenge the child to deal with your information so the child is, indeed, a two-way communicator. So the third principle is to challenge the communication to be really two-way by the child not only expressing ideas but also dealing with your ideas. If the child is not incorporating your ideas, simplify them, but challenge the child too. "What did you think about what I just said?" "I don't know what you just said, it was too fast." "Well, let me run it by you again, then." Ok? In other words you build on the child's natural interest, but you challenge the child so they digest what you are saying, and that way you are stirring two-way communication.

4. The fourth principle is to spend some of the time in active debates. Be a little provocative, be a little curmudgeonly so the child has to think on their feet. But don't overdo that. The younger the child let them win the debates more often. So again, the 70-80% rule holds. Let the child win the debate 70-80% of the time and pitch the debate to the age of the child. With the teenager, you can be more complex. With another adult, you can get very complex. But there too, if it's a person just learning to do this, let them win more of the time. If it is a person who can hold their own, try to make it 50/50 or do your best to win the debate. But throw in curve balls, and teach your child to be a good debater, which is part of being a good communicator.

Also, communication skills come up when it comes to the child's schoolwork in essay writing. Here, being a debater is very helpful. The best way to teach a child to express their ideas clearly in written form, which is being a good essay writer, is to be the devil's advocate. "Wait, you haven't proven to me why the Civil War was more important than the Revolutionary War – you just told me about a couple of the battles and couple names of the generals, but that doesn't prove to me why this is better than that." Challenge the child to actually prove their point. Often, thinking on their feet and challenging the child verbally will help the child express their ideas, and then the child says "The Civil War was more important because the Revolutionary War got us started, but after the Civil War we had a real country and we would have never succeeded economically blah, blah, blah, blah, blah... You say, "Wow, those are great points. That



should be in your essay.” So debate and challenge the child and help the child elaborate more and more their side of the equation.

5. As the last principle, help the child gradually also pick apart your arguments. Say, “Well, what’s wrong with my point of view? Is there anything else wrong with my point of views?” Not only help them be a good listener, but be an active listener.

So in summary, what we are saying about communication at the higher levels, is it requires very active processes of not just listening and memorizing what the other person said. We’re not just having a prepared script of what you want to say, but thinking on your feet. Analyzing what the other person said, taking it apart, scrutinizing it, being a very active problem solving listener, and also being a very active problem solving expresser and communicator of your own. When you do those two things, you challenge that through the good debate, and when you notice there is a weakness in the debate, you challenge that weakness. “Well, you still haven’t convinced me why my argument doesn’t hold water, etc., etc.” You’re challenging the child to be more active in their thinking, and you get the child’s juices flowing and it’s more fun for the child. Now all of this has to be gradual and again, the newer it is for the child, the more they win 70-80% of the time.


Serena?

SW: I think you said it all. As you said, we start out giving the children the benefit of having a chance to feel they made their case, and I think you should start very, very early. You ask children their opinions about things. You ask them to choose their favorite things. You agree and you disagree. It’s these small, little conversations you have, kind of day-by-day, that will build up and strengthen this capacity.

SG: Thank you, Serena. We’re just about out of time this week. We didn’t get through all ten.

SW: Close enough!

SG: Exactly! And next week we’ll continue and we’ll finish up with these ten traits. We’ll talk about *Emotional Range and Balance*, *Self Awareness*, *Discipline*, *Vision and Creativity*, *Logical Thinking*, and also *Ethical and Moral Integrity* which is so important for all children. So next week we will continue on the ten traits and complete them, and we look forward to you joining us then. Serena, thank you and thank you all for being a part of our show today. We look forward to speaking with you next week.



Again, if any of you have questions, please email them in, or feel free to call in, and often as in the past we will collect questions and then devote a few shows just to people's questions. So I look forward to seeing you all next week and thank you again for joining us. Bye-bye.

SW: Bye-bye.