



Positive Parenting
August 2006
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BEING IN THE PRESENT

One early August day, a number of years ago, I turned to my then-grade-school-age son, and blithely announced, “Well, it’s time to start shopping for school clothes.”

A look of horror crossed his face. “Mom,” he implored. “Tell me it’s not time for school yet!” Jonathan, an exceptionally bright, creative, mechanically gifted child, was also learning disabled, and school was not his best subject.

I was quick to reassure him that school didn’t start for a month, that we had lots of summer left. Then, I swallowed hard on my need to be in control, work ahead, have all of my going-back-to-school ducks in a row, and learned from my son how to live in the present.

We had one more glorious month of summer, which we savored. We lived summer until the night of Labor Day, when we put school supplies (you know you’ve already got a stash!) in the backpack, laid out clothes for the next day (not once did he have to go to school naked), and turned our faces toward the school year. Jon was ready. He was refreshed. He’d had a summer, a whole summer, to replenish his endlessly curious mind and playful nature and sensitive spirit. He was ready to go back to school, with grace and courage and optimism.

I learned so much more than a strategy for helping my son deal with anxiety about school; I learned to really dwell in the present. I learned to savor the sweetness of this moment. This day, this moment is God’s gift to us. We are given it to live abundantly. So often as parents, we overlook the present in anticipation of what is to come, whether it is sleeping through the night, toilet training, a driver’s license, college acceptance ... and then we sit in the empty nest and wonder where it has all gone.

Jon, thanks for inviting me to be present in the moment, in all of the moments of our life together. Thanks for teaching me to savor this day, this moment. Thanks for not letting me rush by our life together by living in the fast lane. Thanks for inviting me on the byways and country roads, to really experience life together, to know that we were making memories that will last a lifetime.

Life has come full circle: Jon just finished building an amazing swing set for his son. He slowed down to the pace of a 2½ year old to include Hayden in the project. No one could have been prouder than our grandson, announcing that he and his dad built the swing set. The point wasn’t to finish; the point was to be together, making memories. Jon, you have been a good teacher and a good learner.

It’s still summer!

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

1. Sit around a campfire, telling family stories and making s'mores. Each share one thing that is really "sweet" in life right now.
2. Lie on your back in the grass with a child. Name the shapes of the clouds.
3. Walk in a park, forest, campground, or playground and pick up trash, leaving it cleaner than when you arrived.
4. Plan a parent-kid date, with the child or youth deciding what you'll do.
5. Have a family picnic, with each person planning one food. (If they are all chocolate, that's okay!)