

## learning for life

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# You are your values



**A** parent arrived 10 minutes late for his appointment with me. He sat down and five minutes later his cellphone rang. He apologised by saying that he always forgets to turn it off in meetings. A few minutes later he innocently asked me, "So how do you teach self-discipline? I can't get my son to take responsibility for his actions."

The little three-year-old came running up to me and exclaimed, "Sammy has painted on the walls with the blue paint!" And so he had – small blue handprints echoing the legacy of his recent passage along the walls and windows.

Children learn and model from observing the relationships between the individuals of their peer groups, siblings and parent-child situations. What views and life wisdoms do you as parents develop in your children through your communication patterns, your laughter, your openness, transparency, your integrity? It is through the actions and behaviours of teachers and parents that the children learn how to manage *being* human. The life-skills and life-approaches we as adults embrace not only provide a more secure environment for the children but, more importantly, they provide tangible examples and situations that the children can observe, reflect on and integrate into their own 'humanity'. We help make one another who we are by how we treat one another.

Sammy had just joined the pre-school group. During the creative time he decided to paint part of the classroom wall and windows with blue hand-prints. The other children came running over to the teacher saying, "Sammy is naughty – he painted the windows and the wall. He's in big trouble now!"

"Okay," said the teacher. "It just seems like Sammy isn't aware that when we want to paint we usually use paper. Our walls are usually used for sticking things onto. I'm going to go ask him to help clean it up."

Another young child quickly piped in, "I'm not going to help. He did the mess and he must clean it all up all by himself."

The other children were all nodding their heads. "This is fair," they seemed to be saying. They didn't make the mess so why should they clean it up? And children are the best judges of fairness. Their lives revolve around calculating if they are being treated the same.

The teacher responded, unperturbed by their apparent unconcern for their friend, "Well, I didn't

do it but I'm going to help Sammy. It's a lot to do. And I think I'm going to use this cloth over here."

The children all looked at each other. The teacher walked away with Sammy to start cleaning and after a short while another voice piped up, "I'm also going to help Sammy." Pretty soon this was chorused by the other children and the cloths were hauled out and there was a lot of rubbing and scrubbing. As the children were cleaning they were laughing and commenting on how much Sammy had actually painted and how difficult some of the paint was to get off.

Within a very short period of time, the walls and windows were cleaned. As they all were putting the cloths away, the teacher asked Sammy if there was anything he could do or say, to thank the children for helping him. Sammy began thanking them individually. Some of the other children who were just coming in also piped up, "And me Sammy. I also helped." And so Sammy thanked them also. As each child was recognised, their faces lit up in smiles and pride.

The above scenario demonstrates the powerful impact that the teacher's behaviour, attitudes and beliefs have on the social development of children. The teacher didn't try to *teach* the children a lesson on helping. He didn't make the other children feel guilty for not helping by saying, "How would you feel if your friends didn't help you?" He also didn't just *act out* the value. Rather, he *was being* the value, with no strings attached, and this created a space for the children to co-own the value and participate on their own terms without being driven by guilt or threats.

Back in the home environment this shows up even more powerfully. Your children are watching you. They want to see if the things you ask of them are fair. The phrase, 'practice what you preach' is too shallow here. Values are lived, deeply and with commitment, not because these are things you want your children to learn, but these are things *you* live as part of *your being human*.

So if you wish your children to be more responsible, accountable, honest or trustworthy, have a look- to see if there is anywhere in your life where these same values are perhaps being overlooked? Your children provide you with an opportunity to see yourself, a mirrored reflection.

Values are who you are, they are the fundamental principles you live by. Not who you would like to be, or think you should be, or practising to be. It's who you are in your life right now.

