A Great Approach for Teaching Values

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The best lessons for our kids are the ones they experience firsthand. In Carey Casey's book, Championship Fathering, he tells a story about how one dad took advantage of an opportunity to teach his kids a real-life lesson they would not soon forget.

It happened some years ago, during a time when a terrible famine in Ethiopia was getting a lot of TV coverage. Pictures of suffering children were everywhere, and one day his seven-year-old boy asked, "Can we send some money to help those kids?"

The dad said he'd think about it. Writing a check would be fine, but he had a different idea. After a few days, he gathered the family and explained about the family budget: if they gave some money, it would have to come out of another expense category. He paused. "Do you still want to do this?" Both boys nodded eagerly.

Here was the plan: during the next weekend they would go hungry for two days -- between supper on Friday and supper on Sunday -- and donate the money they'd normally spend on food. They'd only drink water, no food. He assured them that they were healthy kids and they wouldn't be harmed by skipping a few meals.

As you'd imagine, it turned out to be a memorable weekend. They experienced hunger and learned a lot about sacrificing to help others, the abundant blessings they had been taking for granted, and what they could accomplish by working together.

The experiment took some effort, but those two boys, who are now grown with children of their own, continue to talk about that experience. Their dad was intentional about teaching them important values in a memorable way, and it made a difference for them.

Dad, maybe you won't proclaim a fast for next weekend -- or maybe you will. In either case, be creative and come up with ways your kids can learn important values by experiencing them firsthand. This will probably require you to be intentional, thinking of the values you want to teach, then coming up with specific ways to model them yourself and get your children involved.

For example, to teach thoughtfulness, maybe you can challenge your children to be on the lookout for anyone who may need help during a trip to the grocery store -- by reaching something on a shelf, returning a shopping cart for someone, or letting another shopper go before you in line. Do similar things with other important values: respect, honesty, responsibility, hard work, etc. In addition to building your children's character, you might also be able to make a difference for someone who really needs help.

This "firsthand experience" approach is also vital if you are seeking to instill faith in your children.

ACTION POINTS
- Self-sacrifice is a great value to teach your children. What can they give up in order to benefit someone else?
- Notice and praise your child whenever he demonstrates a positive character trait. If he makes an extra effort to do something good, consider rewarding him for that in some way.
- Along with values, come up with a list of other skills and bits of knowledge that you want to teach your children in the coming years. For some help, check out this resource of 1001 ideas.
- Take time and put forth the effort to help someone in need in your community. Whether or not your children join you, you'll be setting a great example for them.
- Make sure your children hear what you believe about the values that are important to you. Don't let them think you're indifferent about something bad because you're silent about it.

Recommended Resources:

- Teaching Your Children Values by Linda & Richard Eyre
- They Call Me Dad by Ken Canfield, Ph.D.
- Championship Fathering by Carey Casey