

What is a Teachable Moment?

Parents and teachers are told to be on the lookout for teachable moments, a rather hard task if you don't know what to look for. The term teachable moment, most often used in education and parenting, refers to a time when a child (or an adult) seems most receptive to learning something. It also includes the idea that the thing learned at that moment, when a person is on hand to take advantage of the receptivity or interest of a child, is likely to be deeply impressed on the child. It isn't always possible to create teachable moments; they may arise in very mundane situations, or in circumstances that are unusual and unlikely to occur again.

What a child will learn in a teachable moment often depends upon the child's interest. For example, a child could be having a tough time learning about fractions at school, and you decide to enlist the child to help you bake a double or triple batch of cookies. Suddenly, the child's interest is engaged in the process of helping you figure out how to increase your recipe and get accurate measurements.

You can't force these "moments" by expecting a child to be interested when he or she is not. Yet when the child is naturally interested, you have an opportunity to teach about fractions in a completely different setting than the one offered in school, because the way you are teaching is very interesting (and yummy). By allowing the child to help you figure out the measurements and learn things about how fractions are doubled and tripled, and by taking advantage of their keen interest in the subject, you've taken advantage of a teachable moment.

These moments aren't always about teaching traditional subjects offered in a school setting. Frequently, they may be opportunities to emphasize values you'd like kids to learn. Though you can tell your children what your values are, they may be more receptive and impressed when they see you living those values through your example. Taking kids to a homeless shelter where you volunteer or helping out a neighbor may have much greater impact on a child than being told that you're supposed to help neighbors or be kind to others.

At other times the teachable moment may arise on the instigation of the child. Your child may come to you with a burning question that needs your answer or have questions about how people think, feel or work that can open up conversations of a philosophical, moral or religious nature. These are perhaps the most recognizable of teachable moments, since the child is signaling the desire to learn something and is already receptive to being taught.

Some educators feel the phrase teachable moment is overused because they view children as capable of always learning and feel that formal education shouldn't be broken up into "moments." While it may be true that children have an amazing capacity to learn, there may be moments when they are more likely to be open or engaged in this process. Recognizing the teachable moment as it occurs, and taking advantage of it may help bring home certain facts or values that will resonate with children and may enhance understanding of the world, school, values, academic material, or other.

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