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## **Taking Time to Learn and Play**

By M.J. Clark, APR

As we approach adulthood, we often begin to think of ourselves as teachers. We teach younger siblings how the world works, we share our study techniques with friends to help them master tough subjects in school, and we eventually teach new co-workers how to do a job. As parents, neighbors, sports team coaches, or volunteers, we feel we have a lot of knowledge to impart to children, and we may feel as though we are in a constant state of teaching.

Children are also here to teach us. And they have much to share.

I want to challenge you to approach children as though they are our teachers and see what happens. When a child is your teacher, you will find you listen more intently. Sometimes you will crouch down to be eye level with them, so you fully understand their message. You will also come face to face with true creativity. A simple scarf or kitchen bowl can have many non-traditional uses in the eyes of a child. They live in the present moment, in a very spontaneous, creative, excited way.

In a child's world, there is little pre-judgment about people they encounter. I remember once being in line at the grocery store with my niece. Just ahead of us in line was an African American woman. My niece looked at her, then looked at me and said, “That woman has a *really* great tan!” Her innocent comment made me smile, and I will never forget it. The woman ahead of us turned around and smiled too. I bet she doesn't hear that very often!

When you approach a child as though he or she is your teacher, you are escorted into a world of appreciation that many of us have not fully embraced for many years. How wonderful is a green, snake-like hose spurting cold water on a hot, summer day? How perfect is a large, ornate snowflake that lands quietly on our car window? How interesting is a black ant trying to muscle a large crumb of bread, two times its size, back to its home?

Children approach the world with curiosity and excitement nearly every day. They want to learn as much as they want to share what they know with others. They ask questions. Children take turns leading and following. They interact with others, and they tell others what they want or need. Children express emotions openly. Last week my 6-year-old son Connor told a girl, “I love you.” His older brother Carson, who was with him at the time, was mortified and told us both in the car on the way home that he was very embarrassed by what had happened. Connor said, “But I do really love her. She's nice.” I commented to my older son that Connor was entitled to express his feeling of love just as Carson was entitled to express his feeling of embarrassment. I told them that I was glad they both could share their feelings with others.

Children take time to just play, with no agenda or restrictions. This is how they recharge their batteries after a tough day at school. Children live spontaneously, taking pleasure in what comes along for them to discover. They allow the world to influence them at times, instead of trying to control each thing with which they come in contact. Children tell you when they are mad, sad or afraid. They cry when they get hurt, physically or emotionally. They run and laugh and play and fall and get back up again.

Although we adults have responsibilities, jobs, meetings and “to do” lists, I encourage you to rediscover some of the stress-relieving activities of the children around you. Think of a child as your teacher, and spend a few minutes of your busy day with a bowl on your head pretending you are exploring a cave. Who knows what you will discover!