

Say, "Good Morning"



I have noticed that many families are concerned about their children being shy or timid when around new people or situations. Over the last 20 years we have seen this to be one of the more common things we help children with.

We don't have a fast fix for this but have always had success with these children moving upwards in their confront and communication with others and the things and situations around them. I will share my view of why this occurs and how to address it. You can then decide what you would like to do as a parent.

Firstly, most children are easily afraid. Kids you see playing happily at school or home are not always so happy and secure in new environments. This is one of the reasons we do field trips. If you look at life from a child's perspective things look very different. There are so many things around them that they don't understand the workings of and or purpose of. Therefore they can't predict what may or may not happen to them. I had a child at a pet store, not long ago, that went into hysterics when I offered a large shell for him to hold. He was terrified; it didn't match with his experience of little shells.

Each child has different fears, but for many those fears involve people. They know what to expect from their parents and often relatives, then they eventually find that people at school are safe to be around. Often they will feel safe only with the kids or only with the teachers at first.

It's hard to know exactly what they are afraid of and I really don't think they know either. As adults we can see and hear things and predict how those things will affect us and our future. Kids have not gained enough in their analytical abilities, at these young ages, to properly evaluate what they see and hear. So they can see and hear things, then add their own imaginings and come up with understandings that are frightening.

A person wearing different clothes, talking differently, moving too fast, being too interested and on and on, can all be of concern.

A child sees a goat at Happy Hollow. There are pointy things on their heads (horns), and they are going from child to child looking for food. Now, we know these goats are tame, but children could easily draw the conclusion that the goats are going to bite them or even eat them. This uncertainty makes it quite frightening to be close to the goats.

For these types of things I suggest a gradient approach. See the ideas below.



The other area I feel children run into is that they want to be well thought of by others and not disappoint those they care about. They know their very survival depends on their family first; their relatives, friends and teachers next. So, for some kids each mistake can be difficult and whether true or not, they can feel that they have been alienated from those around them. This can put a child on unstable ground which can seem to be a threat to their survival. We try and avoid the use of: you didn't do that right, you aren't listening, etc. Instead we find it far better to say: that is not right or incorrect, Johnny, please come here or are you ready, I want to tell you something. This keeps a separation in the child being good and the error made. This could be a whole subject in itself in another newsletter.

It is also very easy to label a child with so many deficiencies that are really just a part of growing up; shyness and fear are a couple of these. We all want so much for them to be happy and be able to do everything well. Of course we are looking towards their future for them. Patience is one of the biggest keys in working with children. This doesn't mean that we notice areas that need improvement and ignore them, but it does mean that we notice the slightest improvements and continue what is working, or notice that there is no change occurring and come up with a new plan. This is something you can also be aware of at home and when out and about with your children.

One thing I also suggest is not to demand children say: thank you, good morning, etc., but to set the example instead. What can happen is every time a child is told to say good morning and then doesn't do so, they feel even worse about them self and it gets harder. It also put the child in a spotlight with all waiting for the correct response. I've waited a year and more for a child to finely return my good morning, fully on their own. This is a big deal, but I don't let child know that, I just say good morning again the next day. Wouldn't it be preferable to have someone say good morning and really mean it? My favorite next step is when a child feels safe enough to come to me for a hug and kiss.

Then there are some children that refuse just because it's demanded of them. The handling would be the same, the result the same. In either case it is very important that the children perceive no concern or worry from those around them.

We've had some students that would hardly talk to any adults for a year or more, but with patience, rather than insistence, they came through this quite nicely.

Another area I feel strongly about is making kids say they are sorry. The social, "I'm sorry", accomplishes little. If they hurt another or say something that makes another feel bad, we get the kids together to help them talk it out and learn new and better ways to be friends. We've had 4-year-olds begin our school and every time something was done to another student, these students would say I'm sorry. It was just something to say. This is an unfortunate event as it doesn't take long for the rest of the students to

realize the insincerity and it doesn't allow the students using the "I'm sorry" to improve in social skills. This also is handled by getting the concerned students together. Eventually on their own they may tell another that they are sorry and really mean it, then offer the correct help or solution.



Another thing I have learned as a parent, a teacher and a Director is to not be embarrassed by anything a child does or care what others think; especially when we are out. It's not the business of others whether our kids will talk to them or not, or whatever these others may be judging. It is the business of only the parents or the teachers when the kids are at school. I remember the pressure that others try to put on a mom when I was raising my children. I simply did not agree with most of what these others said or were concerned about. Whatever you read or are told by others (even me), look at what makes sense and if it is true for you. Then you can be secure in what you are doing or not doing with your children. As parents, we all sometimes need to reevaluate our views and make changes; this is very positive expansion.

I have found that our kids generally have very good perception of who are good people when we are out. If someone comes up to say hello to them and most of the kids won't talk to them, I trust the kids perception. If we have a new student evaluating and none of the kids will have anything to do with the child, I know they are perceiving something we have missed and I don't enroll the child. The same applies to teachers we are interviewing and even the parents of children applying.

So even though they may often be afraid or shy, given time and the proper help, they will come through OK. When with their group they are pretty impressive.

The following are things I can suggest that may be helpful to you as parents:

1. Patience
2. No forced communication
3. Acquaint your children with the names of things around them, and then gradiently discuss what those things are for and what they do. This could apply to everything from telephone lines, to the noises an air conditioner makes. Acquainting children with more about people they will be meeting could also be helpful. "We will be seeing a man named mark. He has black hair and glasses. He is a daddy and loves to grow plants, etc. Then when they meet, expecting nothing of your child except to look and watch. This is a good way of learning.
4. Go lots of different places, again expecting nothing of your child but to watch, listen and learn.
5. If and when you run into people or things that cause your child to go silent or back up a bit, keep a greater distance so that it is safer to look and learn. For example the boy that was terrified of the large shell; we showed it to him from 20 feet away. Next time maybe he will be able to look from 15 feet, and



eventually he'll be able to hold it. The same kind of thing can be done from a distance with people. You could sit in a mall or park and notice people and things about them. "I see a man with a blue shirt", look, there is a mommy holding her daughters hand". Your child may start playing this game with you and it is fun. A hint though, no matter what your child says, don't correct, even if you hear something you don't agree with as children often view and see differently from adults.

Kids are not social in terms of any kind of political correctness, they are fresh and honest. This can sometimes be a problem. They may say things like, that lady is fat. All that is happening is an observation. This is where not being easily embarrassed comes in. If kids are regularly told not to communicate or to be careful in their communication the world again becomes more dangerous and frightening to them.

At school we have kids say things to kids that are not kind from time to time. The first incident we usually ignore and see if it goes away. The next step will often be to act out kind and unkind communication, then see what changes for the better; No student's names are given as the reason for this. The next may be to get the few kids together that are actually perpetuating the situation and tell each other what they do or don't like about what is being said. We help direct them and present ideas to help them until one of the ideas click and they are friends again. We don't tell them what they said was bad or never say that again. Things kids find to be true and helpful themselves work far better than doing or not doing something as an order. The same is true for saying, "Good Morning". It means something when the child says this because he wants to, it doesn't mean much when said because it must be.

As children grow and have more of an analytical understanding of things, more can be discussed on the use and purpose of manners and so as to be able to make better and better decisions that are their own, not what is expected of them. They will run into people that do not warrant their kindness or goodwill and we want them to learn to distinguish between people of goodwill and people not of goodwill. It's a tough world out there and the meek do not survive well, but those that are willing to speak their mind with a sense of integrity and honesty do.

I hope some of this is helpful to you as parents.

Best wishes,

Candy Mathews
Executive Director
Elan Esprit Preschool

