

Key Principles



- Giving appropriate attention
- Encouraging contribution
- Taking action; explaining less
- Building the relationship

MEET... Dan, two-year-old Katelyn, and nine-month-old Cade. Dan is a single father who enjoys spending time with his children. He has positive expectations for his children's behavior and provides many opportunities for two-year-old Katelyn to contribute to family life. Dan has established clear routines and the children respond well to the orderly household.



Giving appropriate attention



In *Episode 6*, we were introduced to the idea that much of what children do is part of an effort to feel important in the family group. We have seen how children who can't find a way to have a constructive influence in the family will often be disruptive and difficult. In this way, they meet their need to be influential. Usually, though, it is easy to give children a constructive way to be influential and feel important. By giving children lots of attention when they are helpful and cooperative, children have little need to misbehave. Sometimes an opportunity for this kind of appropriate attention occur spontaneously. When it does, parents who consistently express appreciation will see the behavior increase. They will also see a bond of mutual respect develop between themselves and their children. This respect will in turn foster increased cooperation. In addition to using spontaneous opportunities, parents can also arrange routine and special activities that allow children to make constructive contributions to family life. In this episode, we meet a father who is a master at giving his children appropriate attention. We also see how his efforts have helped build enjoyable, mutually respectful relationships with his children.

Encouraging contribution

In this series, we have met many children who contribute to family life. In *Episode 3*, we met Anthony, who every evening helps his mother prepare dinner. In *Episode 6*, we watched as two-year-old Adrienne happily helped her mother put away clean dishes. In *Episode 9*, we met budding master chefs Jonathon and Miranda. In each of these families, the children are learning new skills on their path to independence. They are also learning to feel competent and confident. In this episode, we meet a father who offers many opportunities for his daughter to make a positive contribution. Of special interest this time, we will see how skillfully he breaks tasks up into steps to ensure his daughter's success.

Taking action; explaining less

Dinner time is often the crucible of family life. Meal times can be a trial when children sense that parents are concerned about their eating habits and, as a result, might take advantage of this concern to test and push the limits. We saw in *Episode 9* how Jonathon, generally helpful and cooperative, did not settle down to dinner very well. In discussion with Dr. Morse, Esther, his mother, said she had been concerned about Jonathon's size and wanted to be sure he ate well. Jonathon probably picked up on his mother's concern and responded by testing her. In this episode, we see another generally cooperative and helpful child who dawdles over dinner despite her father's prompts to eat. The experiences of these parents can be a reminder to all parents that taking action quickly when necessary will minimize disruption and foster cooperation.

Building the relationship

Every parent wants to have a good relationship with his or her child. Yet, many parents do battle on a daily basis with their children. This is a sorry, and unnecessary, state of affairs. Throughout this series, we have seen how important it is to help children make sense of the world by setting—and following through with—reasonable, respectful limits. When parents provide this kind of environment, children don't need to push and pull in their relationships with their parents to find out where the boundaries are. Instead, they are free to grow and develop in a context that successfully balances their need for order and for freedom. We have seen how difficult it can be for a child and parent to build an enjoyable, respectful relationship when this balance doesn't exist. In this episode, we will see how establishing clear expectations and routines and encouraging contribution work together to build a warm, respectful relationship between a father and daughter.



A CLOSER LOOK...

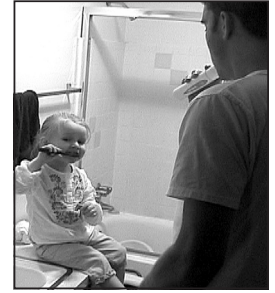
Applying key principles in this episode

Giving appropriate attention

"Thanks for the Invitation, Dad"

Dan gives both his children a lot of positive attention that encourages them to be cooperative and self-reliant. As the evening begins, Dan invites Katelyn to participate in making dinner. She enjoys helping and in most cases readily accepts Dan's direction. When Dan makes the decision that chopping the frozen juice concentrate isn't appropriate for Katelyn even though she wants to do it, she readily accepts and does her part of stirring the juice. Dan tells her "Good job!" frequently during the meal preparations. When she resists washing her hands, Dan tells her simply that he will wash them then, and Katelyn goes along with this logical consequence. The positive attention and Dan's reliance on kind and reasonable firmness have paid off. When Dan needs to take a business call, Katelyn is quiet while Dan is on the phone, showing that she accepts that she cannot have Dan's attention all the time. Even nine-month old Cade settles down easily after minor fussing when Dan puts him down so he can eat dinner with Katelyn. When Dan gives Cade most of his attention after dinner, Katelyn accepts this without fussing, probably because she knows that she and

Dan will spend time together after Cade goes to bed. And indeed, they do. After Cade goes to bed, Dan plays with Katelyn in her room, drawing with her, playing house, and reading stories. Later, Dan brushes his teeth at the same time Katelyn does. Dan makes these activities enjoyable and creates room for Katelyn to actively participate. Because Katelyn receives so much positive, appropriate attention, there is little reason for her to challenge Dan, and she participates enthusiastically in family activities.



Encouraging contribution

A Willing and Enthusiastic Contributor

Katelyn enjoys her role in the family and her relationship with Dan. And who wouldn't? Imagine yourself as a guest in a family where you were asked to help make dinner and told many times what a good job you were doing. Then, imagine after dinner that you were invited to play and share story time with other family members who were kind to you and let you know they enjoyed your company. This is Katelyn's world: she has many opportunities to contribute to routine and special activities, and hears frequently from Dan that he appreciates her. Even during story time, Dan gets Katelyn to contribute by filling in missing words and describing what is happening in the illustrations. All this attention and Dan's belief in Katelyn's competence help build a strong bond between Katelyn and Dan. They also provide Katelyn with many opportunities to learn new skills and build up her confidence, all the while letting her know she is a valued member of the family.



Taking action; explaining less

Katelyn Puts Dan's Feet to the Fire

Katelyn is clearly an encouraged, cooperative child. She enjoys her place in the family and treats Dan respectfully. Yet, even she pushes the limits when she senses that Dan is less decisive than usual. When Katelyn dawdles over her dinner, Dan reminds her to eat, prompting her several times to eat more chicken. When Dan asks Katelyn if she is done, she says, "No," and Dan gives her another opportunity to eat. When she doesn't eat more this time around, Dan finally realizes she is fiddling around and he removes her plate. Katelyn says again that she wants to eat, but doesn't pursue it when she sees that Dan is firm that dinner is over. In hindsight, Dan can see that he gave Katelyn too many reminders and chances. Next time, he says, "it will click sooner." While it's interesting to see that even a child like Katelyn will push the limit when possible, it is also encouraging to see that she doesn't try to pull her father into a power struggle. In the end, the habit of being cooperative and the good relationship she and Dan have established win out.

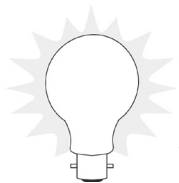
Building the relationship *The Case of the Spontaneous Hug*

Watch Katelyn carefully while she and Dan are reading. Here is a child who revels in this special time she spends with her father. Look at her expression in the picture on the preceding page. It would be hard to find a picture of a happier child. At one point while Dan is reading, Katelyn leans over and gives him a hug. In this episode, we see clearly the benefits of providing an encouraging, orderly environment. Not only does Katelyn have many opportunities to contribute and develop new skills now. In addition, she and her father are building the kind of warm, respectful relationship that should endure as Katelyn matures and moves toward independence.



Action Guidelines from This Episode

- Break complicated tasks into parts for parents and parts for children.
- Give positive attention to reduce negative interactions.
- Take action the first time, and don't remind.
- Give lots of loving attention.



YOUR TURN

What would you do?

1. Choose one activity during the coming week in which you want to give your child an opportunity to learn new skills and contribute to family life. Choose something your child enjoys. Remember to sidestep attempts at power struggles. Express confidence in your child's ability and give her lots of encouragement.
2. Is there an area where you are encouraging uncooperative behavior by giving reminders instead of taking action? Dinner time and clean-up are two common times when this happens. Perhaps the difficulty crops up at one of these times, or another, like getting dressed and ready to leave the house in the morning. Pick one activity you want to improve. For the next week, state the needs of the situation once, then act if your child is uncooperative. Watch for changes in your child's behavior.