

Some authors recommend similar interventions in context of a "special time." That's fine if you have longer periods of time available. However, with our busy lives, we often must capture just a few seconds here and there with our children. **That will work.** Half-minute visits using Video Moments are all that are required. Do as many as you can per day, whether they are between tasks or during commercials. Twenty visits a day would be incredible. However, you need not be a saint. Ten visits a day would still be hitting a home run. *The total daily time of this intervention may add up to only five minutes.*

Finally, keep in mind that this is only the first step. If you were rewiring a house, the first step would be to get to the wire box. This step is equivalent. The work we do here sets the stage. We can't mess around with the wiring unless we have proper access. We are setting out virtually to rewire the way in which your child chooses to function.

Obviously, while you are laying the groundwork with the initial interventions, many difficult behaviors will continue. **For now and for a few more weeks, until the timing is just right to set up consequences that will work, avoid as much as possible giving undue attention to negative behaviors.** *If a rule is broken, as a temporary measure issue a consequence with as little discussion as possible.* Very clear instructions will be recommended later in the book when the stage has been properly set.

STEP 2: EXPERIENTIAL RECOGNITION *Instilling Those Wonderful Values*

The thrust of the thinking and intervention in this next step is to further heighten the level of successes and to capitalize on the momentum and opportunities created in the first step.

Here's where parents, teachers and others who work with children can instill some of the cherished values that are dear to their hearts.

When parents are asked about the positive qualities and life skills that they find important, most begin with: using a good attitude, showing responsibility, being respectful, being cooperative, getting along with others and using good manners. A handful of additions typically follow: playing nicely, being helpful, making an effort, expressing feelings in appropriate ways, making good choices, using self-control, showing compassion and more.

In other words, any quality that fits in your family's value system, any quality that may be valued in the broader scope of the community and basically any quality that you would like to see occur more often, could be considered.

One of the existing myths is that these qualities can be largely instilled through lessons or lectures. However, we find, especially with difficult children who are extremely experiential in nature, that informa-

tion about life is not internally organized or absorbed unless it has relevance or context in the child's personal retrieval system.

Upside Down and Inside Out

In many ways, our traditional methods of instilling lessons of this nature are upside down and inside out. We attempt to teach the rules when they are being broken and we attempt to teach important positive qualities of life when they are not happening.

We typically attempt to give a lesson on responsibility or self-control when the child is not using responsibility or self-control. We tend to give lessons on not whining or not hitting when the child is performing the misdeed. **The receptivity to the lesson is low at these moments.**

The larger problem with bringing up these qualities when they are not being used is this: we ultimately wind up rewarding the very behavior we least wish to reinforce. Given our heritage of parenting ways and means, it is relatively easy to wind up making a big deal when a child is not using a good attitude, or self-control, or good manners or respect.

Even if we deliver a world class lecture or reprimand or appeal to our child's sensibilities, we wind up giving a great deal of emotional energy to the problem. Any way you slice it, five minutes of reprimand or five minutes of lecture translate to five minutes of energetic reward of your time attached to the problem behavior.

We can certainly continue to give lectures, but we must reserve them for when they will shine light on aspects of the desired qualities, even when they emerge just a little bit. When aspects of the undesired qualities rear their heads, the only real choice we have is giving a consequence, without the payoff of our energy. More on that when the timing is just right.

Imagine a folder in the desktop of a computer. In the folder are two items. One is disrespect and the other is respect. If we habitually point

and click on disrespect, the wisdom of the computer will always follow our lead and bring us down the pathway of disrespect. It will have no other way of operating, unless we begin pointing and clicking on respect.

Children operate in a similar fashion. They follow our lead as they learn, assimilate and eventually integrate the values we introduce to them. What we point to and click on and what we give energy to is what is deemed important. **Unfortunately, if the only times we go into the "values" folder is when things go awry, then the child will come to think that it is the negative side of the value that we truly love.** Children readily equate what we put our energy into with what we love. That's how they decode our behavior.

We may mouth the words that clearly state that disrespect and irresponsibility are unacceptable and undesirable. However, if we put our energy into the negative side of those qualities rather than the positive side, our children will unfortunately come to feel that we "love" the disrespect and the irresponsibility. If we water the weeds, the weeds will grow.

What we choose to put our energy into is the nutrition that largely determines what grows and what doesn't. It is also the basis for children's deciphering what we truly love and how they can best obtain quality time. Some children come to believe, on the basis of our actions, that they can get the best quality time when they are misbehaving. Some children feel those are the only times when they can get solid one on one, heart to heart, emotional exchange. Regardless of the negative venue, many will seek the closeness and the intensity.

If we give three hours a week of focused, undivided, excited attention to football or anything else, our child will witness that and will often explore his options until he finds a way to compete. Sometimes, the only other ticket in town is obtained through acting out. **We now want our child to see that the ticket is on the other side of the same coin.** We want him to see that he can get us focused and excited about all the positive aspects of the qualities and skills we value. ***The burden of proof is on us. And we must provide these lessons in the context of the child's actual experience.***

Schools and religious organizations are also notable for attempting to teach lessons out of context. Certainly lessons on valued qualities embedded in interesting stories, fables, lively discussions or role plays can touch a child's life. However, literature is still removed from personal experience: It is an artificial version of an experience.

If the only time we connect the qualities we cherish to actual experience is in the middle of when a problem is happening, then we have an unfortunate situation, especially for the difficult child, who is set up to make frequent and intense challenges to the limits.

If you were a difficult child, what would your relationship with responsibility or respectfulness or cooperation be if the only time you heard those words was when you were having a problem? **They would eventually sound like dirty words.**

One reliable way we can help children to believe in themselves and to believe that our valued qualities are truly within them is to massage aspects of those qualities when they are actively happening, even if those instances are in underdeveloped states of emergence. Every plant was once a seed. This can be called coaching or mentoring or even gardening the qualities that you wish to see grow.

The good news is that all of what's been said points in an encouraging direction. First, we as a society still very much have positive qualities that we value and wish to convey to our children, and second, we as adults very much see ourselves in the role of teacher. That is indeed good news. It could be otherwise. The framework to move forward is present, even if the tools that we have been given to construct the valued qualities are in need of revision.

In other words, if you as a parent or a person who works with children have the desire to teach positive qualities and life skills to your children, we can help you.

Let's focus on positive lessons. Is it possible to add new context when these qualities are being introduced? Is it possible to embed the lesson in an actual experience so that the message has increased impact? You bet.

It's actually very easy. It builds very smoothly onto the new context of experience that we've already begun. It just requires another little bit more cleverness and creative thinking along with good old application.

Giving the Moment New Meaning

We want to be in a position to reformat any given moment with our child and be able to make it into a successful experience. We want the lessons we wish to convey to have context and real meaning. That is an empowered position.

A disempowered position is one of waiting for positive experiences to happen and having a limited view of when and where those kinds of successes take place. An empowered position is one of co-creating those experiences in a determined manner.

If you are not sure about the emotional energy you can reflect when your child is going along in an ordinary manner, ask yourself if you're pleased when your child isn't causing problems. If the answer is yes, then you have some emotional excitement to reflect. Or, conversely, ask yourself if you are upset when your child is acting out. If the answer is yes, then you have some emotional excitement that can generate powerful successes. Just tap into your emotion and let it show.

Saying "Thank you" more often to your child might be of some help, and adding some hint of real pleasure in your voice along with it might get more positive events to occur. **However, if it's your core desire to help your child reinvest his or her fund of energies and intensity into successes, then a slightly more intense strategy is called for.** Bring on the transformation.

Experiential Recognition is a technique that calls for uniquely capturing a moment. You create for your child's benefit a positive picture of an event that is either presently unfolding or that has been completed in the recent past. **And you re-frame that moment in such a way that the child not only can digest it as a nutritious experience of success, but in a way that lets her perceive your excitement in connection with a positively valued behavior.**

You are using your parental creativity to enrich an experience that might otherwise have passed unnoticed or been given no thought, especially by the child.

Here are illustrations:

Brandon is playing a video game. He thinks his mother hates the game. She approaches him, does a Video Moment, and adds some Experiential Recognition:

"I see that you are very focused and that you are using a lot of concentration. I really like the effort you are making."

She values those qualities and is thus enhancing those qualities. She is creating a specific lesson on effort and concentration in context of an **actual experience**.

Hannah has tried to use words to get Alex to stop chasing her, but he continues and she walks away frustrated. She thinks she has mishandled the situation. Here are several possible approaches applying Experiential Recognition:

"Hannah, you made several good choices. Even though Alex didn't stop, which looked frustrating, you used your words very well and then you made another good choice to walk away when he didn't listen. I'm proud of you." Or:

"I really like the self-control you just used. You could have gotten very angry when Alex didn't listen. You stayed cool and handled your feelings very well by walking away. You were thoughtful and used good judgement. I also like that you tried to use your words first. I value that."

Julio, who has alienated many peers by pushing the limits, is playing soccer with a small group on the playground. The game has just started and Julio has not yet shown his normal aggressive attitude. He can honestly be told:

"Julio, I notice that you are using a respectful attitude and that

you are being cooperative. That's considerate and an excellent choice." Or:

"Julio, I appreciate the positive control you are using. That is very helpful to your teammates and a healthy way to be powerful."

Yes, these comments are truly being pulled out of the sky; out of left field, so to speak. However, that is part of the nature of creativity. A child like Julio might otherwise believe that he is screwing up as usual. He certainly could have the impression that the only way to generate attention and interesting adult and peer reaction is to stir up trouble.

When kids like Julio are not causing trouble, our natural reaction more often than not is to feel relief and to take advantage of the break by doing other things that need to get done.

To form an opinion of himself other than feeling he's only interesting to us when he's causing trouble, the Julios of the world need us to stay very conscious and determined. By so doing we provide new experiential evidence that it's not a question of whether he can or can't be any of these valued qualities... "he is."

He's not very likely to form these new opinions on his own. He needs our help in creatively sorting his experiences out loud, providing affirming and acknowledging documentation.

Experiential Recognition: Critical Points

- Experiential Recognition "freeze frames" a picture of success for your child in a meaningful here-and-now instant. This strategy heightens the level of successes given to your child. **This level of recognition tremendously expands your child's perception that he or she is valued and recognized for positive behaviors** and creates for him or her a heightened perception that it is not necessary to go to the trouble of acting out to get noticed.
- This strategy provides clear, specific feedback to your child regarding

values, behaviors or attitudes that are considered desirable. **This form of experiential, moment-centered and heart-centered teaching is our choice as the most effective means of shaping positive values for the difficult child.**

- It allows you to transform a relatively neutral experience in your child's mind to one that is positive. It gives the desired quality context. Focusing on successful behaviors rather than undesirable ones gives you greater influence as well as the most mentoring leverage with your child.
- Experiential Recognition provides parents with an instant tool that takes only seconds and yet has an enduring effect.
- These acknowledgments expand your child's ability to take in positive self-information and thereby build self-esteem. *Each acknowledgment gives a direct experience of being held in esteem.*
- Experiential Recognition should be done opportunistically, as often as possible (several times per hour, if possible, during time spent together).
- During your Experiential Recognitions, it helps sometimes to underscore the value or skill at play by saying "you're being successful right now in the way you are showing respect" (or substitute any other quality that applies).
- This technique is like a video playback that heightens your child's level of perceived success. It also *begins preparations for effective consequences* because this step begins the process of defining the true distinctions between desirable and undesirable behaviors.

Experiential Recognition: Prescription

- Try to find several instances of Experiential Recognition per hour that you are with your child, keeping these freeze frames short, specific and positive.

- Focus on times when your child is acting appropriately alone or while interacting with others.
- Be creative in pointing out both small and big positives. Both count equally in the process of teaching and supporting your child. In fact, in the beginning, the small behaviors may even count more to your child.
- Teach this recognition technique to other adults who are care providers for your child or significant contacts. The more support and positive pictures given by others, the faster the transformation will occur.

Remember

You are assisting your children in figuring out what to make of experiences in different situations. **Don't assume that he knows that he is doing okay.** A child who has been living out a predominantly negative pattern of behavior for some time may well be under the impression, at any given moment, that he or she is doing something wrong, or not doing anything particularly positive. **Help such a child size up both new and familiar situations in a favorable light.**

Adding a dash of emotion to your description, along with some appreciation, will deepen the healing effect and will make the success more powerful.

And once again, keep Shamu and the tollbooth attendant front and center in your consciousness: Where are you going to start the rope and how are you going to choose to view the things you see?

Keep in mind that every desirable quality has many facets. A positive quality like respect or good attitude can be reflected and given recognition from many angles. Each angle is an opportunity to teach nuances of that quality as well an opportunity to show your love.

Like polishing yet another facet of an incredibly precious gem, the more attention to detail, the more it shines.