

“Don’t Lecture Me” – The Power of Story With Your Teen

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David’s two-year old sister, Mya, watched as he filled the frying pan with oil then turned the burner on to high. He grabbed the bag of frozen french fries from the freezer and tossed it on the counter. The oil heated up quickly. Mya moved closer for a better view at what big-brother was doing. “Move back Mya! This is hot!” David warned. Mya backed a couple of steps; but kept her eyes fixed on what big-brother was doing. David ripped the french fry bag open and tossed a handful into the hot oil – the loud crackle made Mya’s brow furrow, David yelled out like any 15-year-old would; “That’s what I’m talkin about! Some hot fries!” He grabbed the handle of the frying pan and shifted the pan over the gas blaze – the fries crackled some more. His cell phone rang. He looked at the phone, then at the fries, then at his phone again. “Hello?” It was Brianna. His big crush. “Hey, how did you get my number?” David’s was lost in amazement. He was on the phone with Brianna Lovebrook! He walked out of the kitchen smiling, heart throbbing, and lost in the conversation.

Mya toddled closer to the pan with its searing hot oil and scorched fries. She looked at David. He gabbbed away with his back to the stove. She moved closer to the stove; determined to do the same as her big brother; she wanted to look in the pan to see what all the commotion was about. David continued talking and walked out of the kitchen. Mya reached for the pan, but couldn’t quite touch it. Standing directly under the handle, she raised her little self up on her tiptoes; then reached for the perilous concoction again; and then all at once....

The Power of Story

And then, all at once what? What? What happened? The power of story is strong. People love stories, young people, old people, and people in the middle – including your teen. You want to lecture about kitchen safety to your teen? By all means keep the lecture but augment it with a story, a true story you’ve read in the newspaper, magazine, a reputable website, or even a story from your own life experience. Now in my tenth year of school counseling with four years of

teaching before that, and having raised a teenage daughter, I've witnessed the power of story and how it makes lessons come alive for young people.

1. Tell a story

The story is one of the greatest teaching tools you can ever use to drive a point home to anyone; but it is especially useful for adolescents. They don't like to be lectured. Many studies have demonstrated that much of the conversations between parents and teens are parents giving directives to their teens and not a give and take conversation. It gets old for them. Parents preach because it's necessary but it's also convenient. Notice I didn't say replace lecturing with story-telling. As parents, we still must say what we mean to say but the delivery of a story will add a whole new dimension.

2. Read or watch a story.

Besides you telling stories, have someone else tell the story; meaning, take your daughter to the movies; read a book, magazine, or blog together. My wife and I recently saw the movie "The Butler" starring Forest Whitaker and Oprah Winfrey, among other stand-out actors. It is a true story of an African-American gentleman who is a butler, renowned for his impeccable servitude and civility. His abilities eventually land him a job in the White House. He works toward civil rights during the 1960's in one way while his son works toward civil rights for people of color in another way. The movie lasted for over two hours, and the audience was glued to the screen. It delivered many lessons on civil rights, history, the cultural milieu of the 1960's and much more. And it was all impressionable. A two-hour lecture could never impress such lessons on our hearts as story can. Find a good movie that has a message you'd like your kid to hear and see and watch it with her. She's bound to share her opinions about the story.

3. Listen to your teen tell his story.

Listen for when your teen is "telling a story", then ask questions. In so many words, have your teen elaborate about a situation that they are sharing with you. For example, if they are telling you about a friend who received a speeding ticket ask them, "I wonder why he was driving so fast?" Or if they are sharing a situation about themselves, ask a question and allow them to answer. Their answer will allow you to know how much they know and you can intersperse nuggets of wisdom as you listen to his story. King Solomon once said, "Of making many books there is no end." Such a simple yet profound statement. People through the ages have loved stories, people of all ages – use story to impart wisdom to your kids. They will love you for it.

Oh right, the story from the beginning of this post is continued here: And then all at once, it dawned on David that his little sister was alone in the kitchen with the frying pan. He dropped the phone, darted into the kitchen and swooped her up just before her little fingers grabbed the pan. "Whew, Mya! You scared me half to death – mom and dad would have killed me if you would have gotten burned." I gotta be more careful with this cooking gig."