

**Tips for Parents** by Susie Kohl

## *A Visual Dimension to Communication*

**U**SE DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY to lift your child's mood and aid her development. When my husband seems worried, I sometimes surprise him with a photo he hasn't seen in a while—a picture from our wedding album or one of our grandchildren. Sharing a happy visual image enhances his perspective faster than anything I could say. (Witness the persuasive power of imagery in advertising.)

Try communicating with your child using photos. Hang a funny photo of him on the door before you pick him up from school. Start your time at home by talking about the picture. Instead of sending a note in your child's lunch, include a picture, protected in a plastic bag, of the two of you having fun together. Your child will have instant access to the happiness of that moment and a sense of how much you value your time together. Instead of reading a story at bedtime, talk about a family photo. Create a family game called "Who can guess what happened in that photo?" Reminiscing supports feelings of closeness.

Photos can also increase a child's sense of capability. Take a picture of your child clearing his plate from the table and post it next to the dishwasher. Looking at a photo of accomplishment will encourage responsibility. Take pictures of your child showing the things he can do and send it to his grandparents. Make a photo book entitled "I Can Do It" showing a variety of your child's skills from making a bed to kicking a soccer ball. Photograph "firsts" like putting on his own shoes, combing his own hair, organizing his books.

You can also teach skills effectively through photos. Take a picture of your dining room table set for a meal. Can your elementary-age child follow the photo? Emphasize the fun of trying. To teach a skill, photograph the steps of a task and hang them next to the activity, such as making a bed.

You can also signal a child to remember a task through visual images. Reminders feel like nagging, but a close-up photo of your guinea pig's face posted next to the cage with the words "Feed Me" motivate action. Take a picture of your child's hands gently touching a pet or a delicate object. You can point to that posted photo when you want to communicate about "gentle hands."

Photos are especially helpful when a child is missing someone or has experienced a loss. Linda Goldman, an international consultant on young people and grief, suggests children create a photo album called "My Life" when someone important to them passes away. Parents can record a child's story to accompany photos of a lost pet. Children also love making a special frame for a picture of a beloved grandparent or friend who is far away.

People often complain that technology like e-mail and iPhones interferes with family time. Put these interruptions away and use innovations like your digital camera to enhance your child's life and your family's communication.

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