

## *Capturing Children's Growth in Words*

**H**OW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE the new growth emerging in your child right now? Digital photos and videos of class parties and graduation will document the end of the school year in technological profusion. But how will you remember the wistful feelings you had about changes in his maturity or even frustration at his latest puzzling behavior? Take a few minutes to write your current perspectives down. Most of us depend on photos to freeze-frame the whirling moments of our lives. However, as wonderful as visual images are, they don't reveal our hopes and concerns, our child's accomplishments and struggles, in ways that will inform us about growth in the future.

Many of us feel we don't have time to journal, but recording impressions needn't take much time. A preschool teacher recently scrawled a sign and posted it on the refrigerator in her classroom: "Gavin does not have a binky. He is so brave. He is so big." How wonderful it will be for Gavin's family to look back on those words months or years from now and comment on his bravery—a trait he might want to call up in the present.

You might also want to quickly note his teacher's sensitivity to his plight and the words she used to describe it. A teacher's insights often offer just the right puzzle piece when you look back on the patterns a child's growth takes. I want always to remember that my grandson's third and fourth grade teacher would tell me that she felt she "would be able to count on him in an emergency." That image always provides such a reassuring image when I picture him going out into the world.

Research shows that journaling helps us understand our feelings, unravel knots in our thinking, and lower our stress. Moving on can be difficult—leaving a supportive teacher or a nurturing room affects children and parents. Your child's stress may also produce irritating behaviors that make life even bouncier. However, science shows that when adults take time to write their scattered thoughts down, the process relieves inner turmoil and helps them organize their thinking.

Parents and children might journal together in a "moving forward" book. Expressing themselves in writing helps give children the sense that their feelings are understood. Capture your child's sense of all kinds of struggles or anxieties and hopes about "What comes next?" before those thoughts evaporate in new bursts of activity. Whether you're recording dictation from a preschooler or writing your own feelings, record some images of your child right now:

My child's strengths are \_\_\_\_\_.

My child finds joy in \_\_\_\_\_.

I have faith in my child's development because \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_.

I hope my child remembers \_\_\_\_\_.

*June 8, 2011*