

Tips for Parents by Susie Kohl

Filling Their “Buckets” With Kindness

A POPULAR CHILDREN’S BOOK called *Have You Filled a Bucket Today?*, by Tom Rath, provides a wonderful visual image of the way our words affect other people. One primary concept is that each of us has a metaphorical bucket with us wherever we go, and kind words and deeds fill it up, while negative interactions leave us feeling empty.

Rath’s book offers a language for talking about interactions with others, emphasizing the power we all have to help others feel good about themselves and help interactions to stay positive. Some teachers in our preschool and early elementary grades have used these concepts in very practical ways. They ask children to think about ways they repair an upset or cheer up a classmate. “What could you say that would fill your friend’s bucket?”

The book has become very popular, and parents report successes with using this vocabulary to talk about happenings at school. “Did you fill anyone’s bucket today? Did anyone fill yours?” This type of discussion promotes kindness and helps children learn social skills. Families can brainstorm ways to fill other people’s buckets.

The idea of filling and emptying can also be used at home to resolve conflicts between family members. “Did you feel what your sister said was dipping into your bucket and making it feel emptier?” The image of a bucket provides some distance when feelings are intense and offers quick resolutions: “Think of a way to fill your brother’s bucket.”

Wouldn’t it be nice if everyone went through the world thinking about ways to help make those around them feel appreciated and full? This book is a good start.

May 10, 2017

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