

# TEACHING OPPORTUNITIES

- **PLAY TIME-** This is easier with your first child because you will likely spend more time one on one with them than any other child. Children are in a concrete learning phase so often times when they play they will play out real life situations that they see on movies or videos they are exposed to. When they are playing with toys they like to play things that they understand, like family relationships, whatever their particular family situation may be is what they tend to play out. If you are playing with them this can be an opportunity to uphold the boundaries you have set as a family within relationships.
- **FAMILY VACATIONS-** You will have to decide if things will be different while you are outside your normal home environment and how you will communicate that with your family. As a general rule children have a hard time understanding exceptions. They will often try to find ways around boundaries if exceptions are made frequent enough. That being said there are situations where you might need to make an exception and it is important that you let your child know that this is out of the norm.
- **PLAYING DRESS UP-** Toddlers are starting to experiment with pretend play. When they do they often like to change play dress ups to fit the role they are trying to experiment. This can be a good opportunity to remind them that we keep private parts private. This means that if you want to change clothes you need to be in a private place. Some families encourage their toddlers to keep their clothes on and put dress ups over the top in order to maintain their boundaries.
- **SLEEP OVERS-** Your toddler is likely not having too many sleep overs but now is a good time to talk about your boundaries with sleep overs down the road.
- **TALK ABOUT YOUR DATE NIGHT-** It is good for toddlers to see mom and dad spending time together. Get a babysitter and go on a date explaining to your toddler that you are going to spend time together. You can even take your toddler on a date one night.
- **CUES & REMINDERS-** When toddlers aren't following boundaries an easy way to remind and redirect them would be to state the boundary again. Something like "You want to change your clothes, you can do that in a private place like your room" can be a simple, helpful reminder that doesn't condemn them for breaking the boundary.

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- **PREGNANT MOTHER**-This is a perfect time for you to teach a toddler, at a toddler level, what is happening to mom. A baby sibling is coming and changes are not as visible at first but as mom continues her pregnancy questions will come. Focus your information on creation and not how pleasurable sex can be. This will fit nicely into their concrete way of thinking and learning during this stage of life. If you decide to breastfeed your baby, this is a great time to talk about what breasts are for and how they work. How you speak about periods, pregnancy, labor and delivery, post partum all effect your older child's view of sex. Be aware of what message you are sending when you talk about these topics with others. That goes for mom and dad. Remember, toddlers are all about feelings so it's not just about the words you are saying.
- **THE ADULTS BATHROOM TIME**-When is it appropriate for your toddlers to be in the bathroom with you when you don't have clothes on and when is it inappropriate? This is an excellent question that a lot of parents ask. The answer is not as black and white and parents would hope. The parent can decide this based on where their child is at. For this particular situation you'll know it when it happens. To give one example of this a father was getting out of the shower and his wife and toddler age daughter were in the bathroom. As he was drying himself off he saw his daughter staring at his penis. She was not old enough for a rich vocabulary yet and didn't know what it was called. The father later told his wife "I'm done having her in the bathroom when I am naked. Today made me feel weird". Like this father, parents can be the deciders of this, just make sure you have a why, you may have to explain it to your child.
- **SHOWING AFFECTION TO YOUR PARTNER**-Giving a hug or kiss when dad is leaving for work or when mom comes home is a simple way to show healthy intimacy to your toddlers. They will soon want to participate. This can be a good time to talk about different kinds of intimacy with different people. Mom and dad give different intimacy to each other than they give to their children. Mom and dad may kiss on the lips and parents give children kisses on the cheek. This is a good time to model that explain why the intimacy is different within each relationship.

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- Dialog explaining different relationships and levels of affection. "Can I give you a kiss? I gave you a kiss because I'm your mom and I love you. Sometimes to show love we can give people in our family kisses. If you want to show love to a friend you can give them a hug."

You know your child. You know what they can handle and what they aren't ready for. Even if you don't know exactly you can follow your parental intuition. There are not specific ages where certain things need to be taught. There are of course recommendations\* but every child is different and has different needs and capacities. When you feel like they are ready go for it. Don't be afraid of over exposing them.

These are examples and suggestions. If you haven't done all of these teaching opportunities, or don't intend to do them all that is up to you. Consider these scenarios and others and decide what is best for your family.

Keep in mind that your toddler will be far from perfect at following your family boundaries. This is the time to practice them, when the consequences are not so serious.

When they do break family boundaries we should point it out but not in a blaming, shameful, public way. After all, that is not connecting but outcasting, as we blame and shame. Remember that hiding comes from shame.

Gently remind them of the boundary over, and over, and over, and over, and over again. They are still learning and practicing. As the parent reminds the toddler, it is best to explain the "why". Be patient and consistent.

\*More about that in the next section "Children" as well as our recommendations of what to teach when.