

A TALE OF TWO SNOW DAYS

BY CHIP DELORENZO, M.ED.

I find much of the content for my parenting articles from the mistakes I make, rather than the successes I have. I do this for a few reasons. First, I'm lazy. I'm hard on myself, by nature, and it's much easier to look at the mistakes that I've made than the successes I've had, and thus an instant topic for my monthly article. Second, because I hate reading parenting articles that convey that the author seems to have it all figured out. I've been teaching for 20 years, and parenting for 13. I don't have it all figured out, and still feel I've got a long way to go. When I read an article where someone seems to have it all figured out, I feel like I've failed, somehow. I don't want those reading one of my articles to walk away and feel like they're not measuring up. This does nothing but discourage someone else. Finally, because I'm a little selfish. I believe that mistakes are the best way to learn (and maybe the only way), and each month when I sit down to write an article, I am given the opportunity to reflect on my own mistakes and process them constructively, so they become meaningful rather than a burden.

We were given the gift of two snow days in a row this week, here in Northern New England. Personally, I really needed them. For no reason in particular, I was really tired early in the week. While educators don't make a lot of money, we do get snow days and some time off in the summer (no complaints here). I was grateful. Not only for some much needed rest, but to be home with my family, which is my favorite place to be.

Not too long into the first snow day, I realized that I also had the time to catch up on some much needed office work that I could do from home. As a school administrator, my days don't always go the way that I have planned. As a matter of fact, the day before the first snow day I had a task list that barely got looked at, as two of our subs were sick on a day when we had planned for them to cover one of the classrooms. That meant that I had to try to figure out coverage and logistics for the day, and provide some of the coverage myself. So, that morning of day one, I saw a terrific opportunity to get some quiet time with no interruptions to get a few things done. Did I mention that I have four children and a new puppy? Do I need to add any more details for foreshadowing?

My day didn't go as planned. It was not filled with a lot of frustration, but that guilty feeling that you get when you know that you should be spending time with your kids, but are fighting it in order to try to get some personal things done. So, I did what any self-respecting adult would do, I found a project that was not a priority and spent most of the day working on that while knowing that I wanted to spend some time with the kids or getting some much needed work done. The day was a bust. We did manage to play a game of Clue before bedtime, but I knew I missed an opportunity that I now regretted missing. In addition, I had to intervene in a number of squabbles and was frustrated that the kids weren't keeping themselves occupied enough to allow me to finish my low priority project. That night I reflected on what I wanted to do differently the next day. I still had some things that I needed to do, but my priority was to hang out with the kids.

The next morning, when I woke up, the kids had already gotten themselves breakfast. I made some coffee, and helped them clean up after themselves. This was important, because the previous day my wife and I had overheard my son saying to one of his siblings, "Don't worry about that, Mommy always

cleans that up for us.” (Sometimes, if we listen, we get all the feedback that we need as parents, no?). After supervising their clean-up, I noticed my daughter was sitting alone looking at a book. I asked her, “Would you like me to read that to you?” She lit up with a big smile and said, “Yes!” We sat down and read together, and my son, Peter joined us.

After reading I began to do some dishes, and then noticed my son Nicholas had taken out a board game and began to play by himself. I stopped what I was doing and asked him if he’d like to play together. As you can imagine, I got the same response. The other kids joined us, and we had a great time (especially me, because I won). Then we cleaned up together. What happened next, wasn’t a new phenomenon, but a great reminder. The kids began to play together and occupy themselves constructively and happily. They were getting along terrifically, and were playing respectfully and purposefully. It was then that I took the moment to sit down and get some work done. This time I was not feeling as though I was running away from what I should be doing. I selected a high priority task and was able to complete it while the kids played happily. Next, sledding!

One of the principles that drives the work that I do with children is: connection before correction. That is we put a priority on connecting with our children before correcting them or disciplining them. My adult mind always tells me that I will spend time with the kids as soon as I get a couple of things done. The problem is that there are always a couple of things to do. Floors to be swept, dishes to be done, bills to pay, phone calls and emails to be returned, thank you notes to write, etc. If I waited until my ducks were in a row to play with the kids I’d have to wait until they leave for college until I had time to play. Ironically, when I wait to tackle my projects until after I spend time with the kids (not just playing games, but cleaning up with them, being present when they do their chores, etc.), there always seems to be time for the projects, and the need to correct or discipline seems to diminish.

Until next time...