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Parents are children's most important teachers

I remember as a young mother taking one of those tests in a women's magazine to find out what kind ^(single page view) of a mother I was. As I recall there were [\(view as multiple pages\)](#) four basic varieties. I don't remember what all the different options were, but I remember adding up all of my points and learning that my style of parenting was the "teaching style."

I was vaguely disappointed. A teaching parent struck me as somehow clinical or sterile. Such a pragmatic approach to parenting. Couldn't I have a nurturing style? Couldn't I be a cuddler or at least a doter? Why teacher?

But as I thought about it, I realized it was probably true. After all, hadn't I taught my sons their colors? Their ABC's. To read?!

I taught them that stoves were hot, to look both ways when crossing the street and not to talk to strangers. All important lessons no doubt but was that the essence of parenting? Teaching?

As my children have grown and I have reflected on the awesome role of a parent, I have decided that teaching is indeed a very big part of that role. Something we do every day, intentionally or not. One of our main goals as parents is to help our children become happy, productive independent adults, and teaching plays a major part in that process. I suspect that those little things we teach our kids every day add up to accomplish that major goal.

Even when we are not in active teacher mode, our kids are always in active learner mode. Think of an embarrassing moment when your toddler has repeated a swear word they heard you use. Or consider the adolescent who takes up smoking to be like his dad and you'll know what I mean.

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Children are little sponges with their eyes and ears wide open, so it is important, that we as parents, be fully cognizant all the time of what they may be learning from us.

We are our children's first and most important teacher. We must choose consciously what we teach them by the choices we make in our lives. The lessons can be simple. When we recycle, we teach them that resources are finite and we must respect the Earth. When we listen to music or visit a museum, we show them that we value art in our lives. When we show up for our jobs every day and give them our all, we are teaching them a work ethic. When we volunteer, we teach them the importance of community. Even when we are socializing with our peers, we teach them that lasting friendships are crucial and enhance our lives.

Conversely, when we call in sick to go shopping, we teach dishonesty. When we speak disrespectfully to our spouse, we are saying it is OK to behave this way in a marriage. And when we overindulge in eating or drinking, we are modeling an unhealthy lifestyle for our kids.

Our children may not always seem to be absorbing all of these lessons, but they are: Remember the repeated swear word!

When my oldest son entered his early 20s he told his father and me that he looked to us as bellwethers; that whenever he wasn't sure of a direction to go or a decision to make in his life, he would think of us and what we would do. Our youngest made a similar comment at about the same age.

So it is clear to me that our children are always learning from us, for better or worse. Let's watch what we teach them.

Dr. Carolyn Roy-Bornstein is a board certified pediatrician with Merrimack Valley Child and Adolescent Health and Merrimack Valley Hospital. Her office is at Merrimack Health Center, 62 Brown St., adjacent to the hospital. She can be reached at 978-521-8108. Parents are invited to e-mail questions for future columns to CRoy.MVCAH@comcast.net.