

Children Live in the Moment

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When we mention future events to our children—or they overhear our conversations, it takes them out of their moment-to-moment world and into our adult world. It is natural for us to want to include our children in daily schedules or future events, either to prepare them or to allow them to eagerly anticipate the event. It makes us feel good when we have given them information we feel they need to have in order to be prepared for something later or to see their eager faces light up. Telling children that we will play in the snow on the weekend, go to a party tonight, play at the park after school, that their birthday is next month, or that grandparents will arrive in a week does fill our children with excitement, but also with a great deal of stress.

Children live completely in the moment! This is a developmental fact for all young children. Around the age of 6 years old, some children can manage a degree of understanding and planning for soon-to-come events. Young children's minds and bodies go harmoniously with the flow of whatever is in front of them at the moment. This is how their brains are wired right now.

Developmentally, children don't have the cognitive skills for comprehending the passage of time, nor do they have the skills (or the patience) to cope with events not happening in their moment-to-moment world.

Yes, children do understand and remember what they are told about future events. Unfortunately, they don't know how to store that information, forget about it and then retrieve it when it is needed; it stays at the forefront of their thoughts and interferes with their moment-to-moment way of living as they wait for the event to take place. This is stressful to young children. This stress can manifest itself through behavior problems, difficulty going to sleep, restless nights, impatience waiting for the event (that annoys adults), increased

sensitivity or neediness, and possibly a build up of anxiety related problems. As adults, we rely on our calendars and reminder notes to maneuver through our days. Children do not have this organizational capacity. Children only require what they have before them—whatever is present in their moment.

As parents, we want to protect our children from all that we can. No one told us before we became parents that developmentally, young children need to be protected from most everything outside of their moment-to-moment world. How do we protect them so they can live in their moments and thrive?

The first step is to notice in a normal day or week how many times you or someone else talks to your child about something that takes place in the future. What reactions or preoccupations do you notice your child having? Practice postponing telling your child about future events. This may take a lot of mental awareness and persistence on your part; it's a hard habit to break. Initially, because children are often so conditioned to knowing about future events, they come to expect the information. They may ask questions about daily routines, etc. Casual, reassuring responses that may be helpful are "I'll let you know when it is time for" or "You can play and have fun, I'll let you know." As children become less conditioned to knowing about future events, they can develop more naturally and live more peacefully.