Michael Brandwein: “Bringing Out Their Best: How To Teach Your Kids Outstanding Skills for Life”

Sponsored by D103 PTO, Lincolnshire Community Nursery School, and Tamarak Country School

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Over 170 parents attended the first ever parent education program co-sponsored by D103 PTO, LCNS, and Tamarak.

Michael Brandwein’s humorous, engaging, and inspiring presentation provided parents with specific strategies that can be used with their children (and perhaps even spouses and coworkers!).

We’re providing these summary notes for parents who were unable to attend the program. More effective learning takes place when you can see the speaker in person; however, we hope this information is helpful.

**Summary**

The most powerful way to teach kids is by example/modeling. “What they see is how they’ll be. “ “What we show is how they grow.” For example, if you want kids to be respectful, you must surround them with respectful people.

Start with small steps. Pick one characteristic you want to work on and spend the next 24-48 hours trying some of these techniques and being conscious of what/how you and others say, not just at home, but everywhere, e.g., can focus on one of these phrases:

“Please”: say “please” and notice when people say “please”

“I’m going to try something different this time”: to teach flexibility (a key quality that employers look for). Say it in the kitchen when you try a new cooking technique or when you park somewhere different.

“I want to learn more about that” to teach curiosity/thirst for knowledge.

We need to talk more about what we value in a positive and effective way without lecturing, but just in day-to-day interactions and stories. Kids will pay more attention to what they overhear us say than when we lecture them, e.g., while driving “That lady let us in. She didn’t need to do that. That was nice.” or share anecdotes about things that happened at work. Hearing examples of caring, generous, etc. people will help children learn to think of someone other than themselves.

We remember by repeating and writing, so Michael asked us to take notes and repeat phrases to help us remember them later.

Three key things to consider:

1. What do we want to teach?

2. Know what these good things look and sound like.

3. Practice communicating about these life skills more effectively

1. **What do we want to teach?** What are the things that are most valuable for children to learn for success in life, e.g., respect, critical thinking, independence, responsibility, caring. The important thing is not what you learn, but HOW you learn. D103 is working on SEL (Social Emotional Learning) which is critical to academic and life success. Instead of viewing kids solely as vessels of knowledge, to be filled, we should also teach kids how to handle stress, etc. because that will help them academically and in life.
2. **Know what these good things look and sound like.** Convert qualities into conduct, e.g., teach how to handle mistakes by reacting to mistakes with “Oops, I’m sorry. Here’s what I can do to fix that. “
3. **Practice communicating about these life skills more effectively.** Identify specific positive conduct and label it for our children, e.g., if they say “ I wonder...” you say “That’s being curious.”

**Four Key Goals for Praise:**

**P**ositive: focus on things that we want to see more of and value.

**I**mmediate: give feedback ASAP. Catch them being good.

**E**nthusiasm: put more energy into being positive (vs. negative).

**S**pecific: go beyond “good job” and say why, e.g., “You did it! You tried 3 times until you go it. You’re persistent.” Giving evidence is more credible and will help build resiliency since it makes self-beliefs stronger if attacked. Can also do this when you are talking about others to give examples that they will overhear.

To help teach life skills, we need to:

1. Say what they did (specific)
2. Label it so it becomes part of their self-image, e.g., “respectful”, “caring”, and they will label themselves with these positive qualities.

**A Dozen Do’s:** Life skills that will help with success in and out of school.

1. Try again: persistence
2. Do something the first time asked: respect, good listening
3. Do something without being told: responsible, leader
4. Do something helpful or caring: considerate, thoughtful
5. Do what said they were going to do: dependable
6. Asks a question about how something works, is done, or made: curious, inquisitive. “That’s what scientists do.”
7. Wait: patience
8. Asks for help: OK to not know answer
9. Tries something new or different, change mind: flexible, curious
10. Makes up a new or different way to do something: creative
11. Working on something hard: courage, tenacity
12. Gives someone a compliment, says something joyful or positive.

**Q&A’s**

1. If child doesn’t listen: praise them when they are listening, e.g., “You were looking at me while I was talking. That shows that you were listening.”
2. If child lies: praise when they tell you something that they didn’t have to. One reason for lies is that they are afraid of mistakes. Let them know it’s not the mistake, but what we do when we make them. Admit if you make a mistake and deal with it. Share stories of making mistakes.