

learning opportunities

THE GIFT OF SELF-AWARENESS & DISCOVERY

By K. Meagan Ledendecker

Recently I missed a perfect opportunity. I was feeling proud of myself because I had successfully redirected my three-year-old from his desire to eat Goldfish for breakfast. He had just finished happily pouring Goldfish into a container to save for snack. The sunshine poured into the windows and seemed to beam down on the lovely scene.

A few moments later, my son had scooped up both the full container and the quite large Goldfish box and moved across the kitchen to put them away. In the process of juggling both items, he managed to drop the not-quite closed container and the entire contents scattered across the floor.

The effect was startling. I think I may have even let out a little gasp. I quickly swooped in and helped him clean up the spill.

As I scooped up handfuls of snack, though, I realized that I had let a golden opportunity slip away.

I saw my son's face right after he dropped the container full of Goldfish. He was shocked. What had happened?

I was pretty sure I knew what had happened. He was carrying too much at once and hadn't even closed the container completely. But did he know?

I wonder what would have happened if I had merely taken a deep breath, paused, and gently with genuine curiosity asked, "What happened?"

What would he have realized?

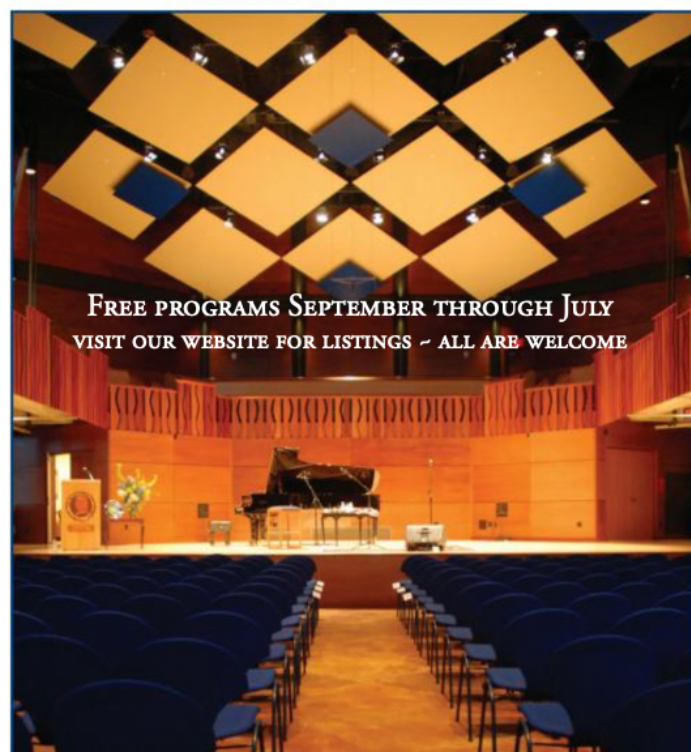
As we raise and guide children, it can be so easy to want to smooth the paths ahead (for them and us). We help clean up spills. We deliver forgotten items. We pack snacks. Sometimes we lecture, thinking . . . if they'd just listen and remember. In smoothing the paths, however, we rob our children of the opportunity to learn from their mistakes.

If I had asked my son, "What happened?" we would have been able to explore the situation. If he had been able to verbalize a response, and if I had really listened without formulating a comeback, I would have had the opportunity to ask another question. "Why do you think that happened?"

After hearing his reply, I could have asked him how he felt about what happened. Maybe I could even have asked what he learned from the experience, or what ideas he had for preventing that kind of spill in the future. Then finally, I could have asked, "How can I help?"

By giving a child the opportunity to reflect, we give the gift of self-awareness and discovery, as well as a sense of competence. A big part of our jobs as adults is to help children learn to think for themselves. I want my son to grow up being able to reflect on his mistakes and figure out another course of action. Next time, I'll be sure to give him the opportunity.

~ K. Meagan Ledendecker is a Certified Positive Discipline Educator, Director of Education at The Montessori School of the Berkshires, and is always on that seemingly unattainable quest to become a better parent. www.berkshireremontessori.org



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