

Genuine Encounter Moments

by Pam Dunn

The simplest form of a GEM has four parts:

1. Totally focus on your child (stop everything else and quiet your mind)
2. Give eye contact and a loving expression to engage
3. Listen closely
4. Be with them without judgment until the moment is complete.

There are no set rules for a genuine encounter moment. You can do them anywhere and any way. As a parent, you can try different ways to discover what the most effective genuine encounter moment is for your child. They are good for children of all ages, and most likely, what you do for your GEM will change with age.

The only common thing to all GEMs is that you are looking for your child to feel loved, valuable, listened to and important. If your child feels just one of those things, you have accomplished all of them. *Each of my three sons were different in what helped them feel as if our encounters were genuine. For me to feel that way three things ALWAYS needed to occur- I had to stop, look at them, and listen – I needed to be fully present to them!* For more information on discovering what you and your child need to feel loved, I highly recommend the book, *The Five Love Languages for Children* by Gary Chapman as a resource.

When you begin a GEM, it is important to stop, look, and listen when your child approaches you. Also, keep in mind that **GEMs** can occur throughout the routines of your day and should not be taken for granted.

A genuine encounter moment can be found in situations that are usually thought of as difficult. Pausing before you react is a common parenting tool taught by Susie Walton. This pause can be a good opportunity to create a genuine moment in which you and your child(ren) can be truthful with each other while developing solutions that you could not have accomplished alone. This moment solidifies the concept for your child that your family is a team. Cooperating with each other, learning together, discovering solutions together, and taking responsibility for the environment of your home together means **GEMs** are the norm.

A genuine encounter moment is a proactive approach to eliminating negative and misguided behavior. YOU can guide your child to behave in a way that expresses their magnificence. This certainly does not mean that you are ALWAYS the cause of their misbehavior; however, it does mean that you can guide them to express their personal best. Acknowledgments and compliments to your child that are genuine and specific are proactive guidance that will show them how to be in the future. Your body language and

tone speak volumes over the words you say. Knowing yourself intimately inspires your child to learn more about themselves. This in turn will teach them which behaviors get in the way of the expression of their brilliance. If you only have room for one tool – choose listening because it helps your child feel valuable, loved and important. Think about it! Don't you want to be your personal best when someone is fully present to you – listening, REALLY listening?

A genuine encounter moment that supports what I know about this topic! I was traveling a lot – a reality I had not considered until this encounter. My youngest son, Drew, was in second grade and I had been gone for six days. During the time I was away, the boys received their report cards. I phoned them to find out how they felt about their report cards. I learned in one of my Redirecting Children's Behavior courses that, as a parent, you ask them how they feel about their grades rather than give your assessment first. I talked with Bobby and Trevor and they were very pleased with how well they were doing. (By the way, so was I!!) I got on the phone with Drew and asked him what he thought about his report card. His tone immediately showed that he felt bad about his "checks" rather than "pluses" on three counts of conduct. I immediately asked him (*thank goodness for my parenting classes*) what he wanted to do about those checks and how he was not feeling good about the report card. He hesitated for about 30 seconds and shouted out, "I want to snuggle more!" Well this was a moment I was grateful for-- a **genuine encounter moment** over the phone-- because I had a HUGE smile on my face! I asked, "So, are you saying that if we snuggle more you will have more pluses?" He quickly replied, "YES!" So my response was, "Then you got it. We will snuggle LOTS more." He said, "Thanks, Mom."

I want you to know that I upheld that commitment. I happily snuggled lots and lots more with him. I also realized that my traveling was having an effect on the family, so I had a family meeting that focused on talking about the difficulties in my travel schedule and how we could make it easier on everyone. That was another genuine encounter hour!