



## Early Learning Areas / Learning About the World

### Teachable Moments



Dear Debi,

One of my cats just gave birth. All of my kids got to watch the process. Was that an appropriate “teachable moment?”

– **Connie**, Los Angeles, CA

#### Debi's Tips



**Debi Gutierrez**

Host

- Provide opportunities to help kids learn
- Observe, listen to and follow kids’ lead
- Recognize positive learning experiences

#### Expert Advice



**Susan Baxter**

Early Childhood  
Education Instructor, El  
Camino Community  
College

A teachable moment is an unplanned event during the day that adults can use as a learning opportunity for kids. When a child displays an action or behavior that can be used as a learning tool, parents and providers should capitalize on the moment, and provide the opportunity to extend or expand the child's learning.

Teachable moments are important for kids because they provide meaningful contexts to introduce or expand on something you want children to learn about. This way they can be used to open conversations with kids – to find out what they’re thinking about. Conversations with the kids will help in the development of their language, communication and reasoning skills.

Infants’ and toddlers’ level of curiosity is much more basic than for preschoolers. For infants and toddlers, it’s as basic as how to open and close a door or how to get food to your mouth. Preschool kids have a sense of language and have more advance cognitive development. Preschoolers have a natural curiosity about all aspects of life. They have more of an imaginative quality and they can express it. Their language skills are more advanced so they have a greater dimension to their learning.

A provider identifies teachable moments by observing and listening to kids, following their leads and looking for interesting occurrences. Listening and observing the child’s behavior is very important. If they’re spending more time on a particular toy or squishy grass, ask them open-ended questions about what they’re doing. Listening to what they’re saying

and if they stay engaged in the conversation and the activity, encourage them to discuss it.

The “unplanned” part is the whole essence of what a teachable moment is all about. It’s about speaking to the moment. It’s spontaneous and addresses what sparked the interest of the child and gives a different flavor to the learning. You’ll notice during teachable moments that the provider becomes more enthusiastic and so do the children.

### Child Care provider Comments



**Dorothy**

Child care provider for 3 years

I have a small garden with zucchini, corn and yellow squash. The kids watch them grow and water them every day. When we were planting them, they would ask me where the seeds came from and I explained how they came from another plant and we have to wait to plant them and watch them grow. So now we have a special day where we are out in the garden, usually every other week and tend to the garden.



**Darlene Patterson**

Family child care provider for 22 years and mother of three

In the morning the kids see snails on the plants in my garden and in the afternoon, when they are not there, the kids ask why the snails are gone. That leads us to a discussion about how snails can’t stay out in the hot sun. We’ve also been talking about the ants we see outside. The kids always want to know what the ants are doing. So we talk about how they’re gathering food and we’ll compare it to how their mom goes to the market to get food. One of the kids told his mother when she picked him up that we watched the ants go to the market.



**Karolina Ramirez**

Child care provider for 6 years

An example of a teachable moment for me would be something that just kind of happened out of the blue. The fish in our fish tank had babies and the kids noticed that there were little fish floating around, so they started to examine them. Because of this, we talk about how the eggs are left in the plants and that sooner or later there will be more little ones. We’ll count how many fish are there or we talk about who is the mom and dad. We talk about how the fish comes from other fish and how they aren’t carried around like humans are. Sometimes the kids will let me know if their mom or someone they know has a baby in her tummy. Then that opens up a dialogue about family dynamics, and babies and things like that.

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