

“Out-Growing Their Age” – How to Initiate Self-Reflection for Your Child

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It is my firm belief that self-reflection can be nurtured in children while they are young. It's different for each child since children mature at different rates, but in general, kids are independent enough around age five to start reflecting for personal growth and accepting responsibilities for their actions. Here is a strategy I have used with my children as they approached each birthday. In our home, we call it “Out-growing our age.” Even as my children are pre-teens now, we continue this practice to encourage self-reflection.

5-Year-Old Reflections

This first started when my kids were approaching their 5th birthday. They started becoming aware that birthday

parties were all about them and that the whole event would be a celebration of them. While I love my kids and love celebrating who they are, I didn't want their birthday party to be self-centered in the negative way. Instead, I wanted their birthday to be a pivotal point for self- assessment. If they were going to get a birthday party, what would I get out of their growing older? I wanted my kids to mature: to out-grow personal bad habits and negative behavior.

A week or so before their birthday, I would tell them that I'm so proud of them and that I'm really looking forward to their getting older and turning 5 years old. I also told them that sometimes, just like how we out-grow our clothes and shoes and can no longer wear them anymore because they no longer fit, we also out-grow bad habits. Could they think of something that is a 4-year-old habit or behavior that they would like to out-grow because it is not fit for a 5-year-old? I left her with a few suggestions to think about.

A few days later, I checked in on my 4-year-old, and amazingly, she said she would like to out-grow screaming tantrums and "I want" demands. (Cue Mama-bear happy dance!) I hugged her and let her know that was the perfect thing to out-grow. I also gave her guidance and suggested she should use the phrase "May I" or "Can I" when requesting something she wanted. We had a few initial lapses, but a few reminders of what she wanted to out-grow was all it took to get her back on track.

Elementary Age Kids' Reflections

Over the years, we had many good heart-to-heart birthday talks about what bad habits and negative behaviors they would like to out-grow. We think of it as a personal year-end review or a self-assessment. Our girls have wanted to “out-grow” forgetting to pick up their stuff (socks, shoes, backpacks, snot rags) around the house, dilly-dallying before bedtime, and being mean to their sister.

Preteen Conversations

Now that our kids are 10 and 12, our conversations are on the positive slant. We look for characteristics of maturity that we want to grow into. For example, the girls have said they want to have better time management, to be more forgiving, to let others have more opportunities to speak at the dinner table, and to be more responsible. These days, their birthdays are a mark of maturity and a real reason celebrate!

Cheers,

Jaime

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