
Holy Hacks: January 24, 2020

By the Reverend Julia Mitchener

Our children will hear how corrupt the government is, how damaged the earth is, and how hateful people can be. Those harsh truths cannot be hidden. Please make time to show them the wonders that nature holds, the beauty that is being created and the goodness that still exists in the world. They need that.

—Brooke Hampton

One of my favorite lines from the Book of Common Prayer is a petition from the baptismal service. It asks that the newly baptized might receive “the gift of joy and wonder in all [God’s] works. Joy and wonder—these things often seem hard to come by in our world. Cynicism and despair are usually considered afflictions of adults and teens, but younger children may suffer from them as well. How can we help our kids experience more delight and awe? How might we help them tune into the goodness that surrounds them? Here are some ideas:

1) Point out kindness when you see it, particularly small acts that might easily go unnoticed. Maybe the cashier at the grocery store is especially friendly and helpful one day, or a driver lets you cut in front of her in traffic. Perhaps the older couple sitting next to your family in church always has big smiles for your kids and never seems to mind when they get noisy. Or what about the teenager in your neighborhood who takes a few minutes to give your child some pointers on his jump shot or curve ball? Or the dependable older cousin who never minds watching your kids at the beach when you want to take a nap? Mention these kindnesses—and kind people—to your children when you see them. By making a habit of naming aloud simple acts of thoughtfulness and generosity, you help train your child to become more alert to everyday goodness. You may also inspire them to emulate some of these behaviors themselves.

2) Gather your children whenever there is a chance to experience something beautiful in nature. My mother used to call me to the window almost every night to catch one of the beautiful sunsets that graced the Mississippi sky in winter. Thanks to her example, I now do the same thing with my own kids. I also try to use some of the time we spend in the car to point out the wonders of God’s world—the beauty of the bare tree branches against a bright blue January sky, the hope brought by the first daffodils brave enough to poke out their heads, the intoxicating scent of freshly cut grass, the mystery of an early morning mist, the soothing drone of cicadas on a summer night.

3) Build a collection of books that tell stories of compassion and generosity and read them regularly. Some favorites at our house include: *Ordinary Mary’s Extraordinary Deed* by Emily Pearson; *Love* by Matt de la Pena; *The Big Umbrella* by Amy June Bates and Juniper Bates; and *Good People Everywhere* by Lynea Gilles. Two books that speak specifically about goodness triumphing over evil are *Desmond and the Very Mean Word* by Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Douglas Carlton Abrams and *The Grand Mosque of Paris* by Karen Gray Ruelle and Deborah Durland DeSaix. (The former is geared toward younger children and the latter toward older ones.)

4) Subscribe to one of those sites that deliver a steady stream of encouraging news to your inbox or Facebook page. One that I like is [GoodNewsNetwork.org](https://www.goodnewsnetwork.org). NPR can be another source. During dinner once a week, share an uplifting story with your family and discuss it.