Parents have many opportunities to visit their children’s schools throughout the year. Attending open house, parent-teacher conferences, special assemblies, sporting events—these events give parents a glimpse of the environment in which their children are spending the majority of their time. But how does a parent know if morality is encouraged there?

Morality refers to social conduct that exhibits good judgment of fairness, honesty, and equality. Research studies and analyses have found that teachers who consistently encourage mutual respect in classrooms help develop morality in their students (DeVries, Hildebrandt, and Zan 2000; Kohlberg and Hersh 2001; Miller and Pedron 2006). Experts suggest that teachers who praise a student’s consideration for others or encourage politeness throughout the school day also cultivate a sense of morality in the classroom.

Children may be able to learn morality by putting themselves in someone else’s shoes (Lu and DeSheng 2004). In terms of equality, honesty, and keeping promises, one study in China found the concept of “If I were you and you were me” to be helpful (Lu and DeSheng 2004). For example, if the teacher explains how either party would feel regarding the betrayal of a friend who broke a promise, both children learn a moral lesson from the event.

In addition to teachers, close friends also have an impact on moral learning (Singer and Donnebal 2006; Walker 1999). When children have a close friendship with at least one
peer, they are better able to tell the difference between the norms of genuine and close friendships compared to the norms of friendship in the context of a group. So the next time you visit your child’s school, check out the playground and the company your child keeps. It may be the values of your child’s friends—good or bad—that are shaping your child’s view of morality.

Listening, learning and living together, it’s the science of life. “Family Album” is a co-production of UF/IFAS Extension, the Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences and of WUFT-FM. If you’d like to learn more, please visit our website at http://familyalbumradio.org or find Family Album Radio on Facebook.

References


