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Family

Friday October 13, 2006

Help kids find comfort in front of an audience

by LISA PREJEAN

Last year when I was making a presentation to the other faculty members at our school, I pocket caught on the easel, the white board crashed to the floor, and the easel collapsed

As I was picking up the mess and trying to continue the thought I was presenting, one of my workers politely mentioned that a sturdier easel was available if I needed it for future present

I thanked her and joked, "Yeah, but then I wouldn't get as much exercise."

It was my feeble attempt to save the moment. It's not easy to make a presentation to your pe

I thought of that presentation recently when my 11-year-old balked at an extra-credit assignment involving an oral presentation. The assignment required coming up with a commercial for a c wrote a wonderful script but then crumpled it into a ball when he found out he would have to front of the class.

"Since public speaking is the No. 1 fear of adults, it's important to get kids comfortable speal groups," says Silvana Clark, a professional speaker and the author of 10 parenting books.

Children should be encouraged to perform before grandparents and other adoring relatives, recommends. "Just singing 'Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star' and having people applaud gives ch confidence."

Here are some other suggestions from Clark; Susan Smith Kuczmariski, author of "The Family Bond: Inspiring Tips for Creating a Closer Family"; and Paul Lawrence Vann, president/CEO of Laurel Wreath Communications Inc., a professional speaking, training and speaker coaching company.

Begin "mini-speeches" at dinner or while in the car.

Give each family member a topic based on their age.

"Your 10-year-old could give a speech on 'Why I need a raise in my allowance,'" Clark says. "Have parents give mini-speeches on silly topics like 'Why our entire family will spend a month at Disney World summer.' The idea is to be light-hearted."

The best way to overcome nervousness is to have the child practice giving the talk in front of audiences, says Kuczmariski. These might include not just parents and siblings, but also a uncles, and even neighbors.

Overcome the "ummm" habit.

Use your home video recorder to show the child her "ummm" habit, Kuczmariski suggests. V observed by her, she will become more aware of it and can then self-correct it.

Or, simply record the presentation on a tape recorder, suggests Vann, author of "Living on t Ground." Let the child listen, and over time he will be able to speak without "ummmms."

"Do what many Toastmaster groups do," Clark recommends. "If someone says 'umm' or 'ahl speech, they have to pay a 5-cent fine."

Prepare well.

Make sure your child is prepared for the oral report. Have her practice ahead of time. "Try to prop that goes with the report," Clark says. "Teachers are impressed, and students have sor hold onto during their speech."

Don't expect perfection.

"View each oral report as a sequence of assignments to get the desired result," Kuczmariski "With more practice, and with additional reports, there should be less nervousness over time

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Basic relaxation exercises defeat the butterflies people often get prior to delivering a speech to Vann's suggestion via e-mail. He says:

"Taking a deep breath, neck roll exercises, and a deep knee bend or two will do the trick.

"The key is to work with children to get the butterflies to fly in the same formation."

Have fun.

"Parents place too much pressure and stress on the child, and this only causes more nervousness," Kuczmarski says. "Reduce the stress, and nurture a 'have fun' attitude. Parents too often transfer their nervousness to their child.

Lisa Tedrick Prejean writes a weekly column for The Herald-Mail's Family page. Send e-mail to lisap@herald-mail.com.

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