

Presentation Pointers

With practice and a few good presentation skills, you just might find your students here one day:



So what can you work on to polish those presentation skills? I'd say there are three things that your "beginning-to-present" kids can practice that will make the biggest impact, so how about a mini series on presentation pointers?

And the first focus area would be:

Eye contact – that means looking at the audience and not at the floor or a paper. This is in my experience the very most difficult thing for kids – especially nervous or shy kids – to master. It's so much easier to hide behind your report! But work with your kids on looking up from their papers or projects and gazing right at the audience while they are talking.

There are actually good reasons for this. First of all, it allows your child to learn to read important cues from the audience such as: am I getting their attention? or have I said too much? Very often, a student can find a lot of smiling, affirming faces in the audience and that is a great confidence booster! As your speaker grows, he or she will learn to see the very subtle things about the listeners in the audience that will help him (or her) pace himself and please the audience. Even though the audience seems scary, it is a resource your speaker can learn to use.

The audience also deserves your child's eyes! Just like a child who wants to have your eyes to know you are really listening, or a parent who demands eye contact so that she knows the point has been communicated, a speaker needs to look at the audience to validate the line of communication. Without eye contact, the relationship hasn't been established.

A speaker looking at the audience will come across as being more confident and authoritative on the subject. They also seem much more sincere.

Steps you can take to work on eye contact:

1. Note cards – These are much smaller than papers or lap books. Let your child use an outline and say a few words about each item on the outline. He probably knows the general information, so it's really okay not to say every written word.

2. Use the stand for lap books or projects to be shown so that the speaker is "hands free" and more available to the audience.

3. Practice, practice, practice – The more times your child practices a presentation, the more familiar those topics become. He or she might even begin to memorize sentences that sound the best. Let dinner time be a practice presentation, or have your family sit on the sofa and be a practice audience.

4. Keep working with your shy, frightened child! I have one of these too, and after about **ten** presentations she has gone from the red, blotchy, frozen, terrified face to a confident, articulate presenter. But that's because I wouldn't let her quit or give up. That will only serve her more in her future life. Because she tends to be shy, she tends not to speak up when a situation demands that she should. If I can give her the confidence to speak up well in an academic environment, that will hopefully overflow into other areas of her life as well and she will be able to voice her opinion when she needs to.

5. Make it fun! Count the number of times your student looks at you during a practice and give her a marshmallow or a chocolate chip or an M&M for each look. Set a goal of the amount of time you want them to be looking up and mark their progress toward that goal on a graph. (Incidentally, by using these strategies, you'll be getting in extra practice on the content as well!)

Happy presenting!