

What kids learn by imitating you

As my day job, I'm a journalist. I've been a reporter for longer than my son has been alive, so he's used to hearing me do phone interviews or seeing me change the batteries in a microphone. He's overheard me talk about deadlines and, apparently, an editor I once had who was particularly strict.

One day when he was about three, he came to work with me. My then-boss came over and crouched down in front of him to say hello. I said to my son, who was shy, "Do you want to say hi? That's Mommy's boss." He peeked his little head out from behind my leg and said, "Oh. The bad guy?"

My point? Kids are sponges, they really are. They are little omniscient beings that see all and hear all and love to store away information for future (and opportune) use.

Not only do you have to watch what you say around them, you have to be conscious of everything you do, and that includes physical activity.

I was never the most athletic kid in my class growing up, but I don't ever remember not being involved in some sort of physical activity, whether it was gymnastics or soccer or track and field. Sports were a big part of my family: my dad did judo three or four times a week, and today he's a fourth-degree black belt and two-time Deaflympics judo coach for Canada. When he had heart surgery a number of years ago, he was back on the judo mats within a couple months.

My sister, brother and I all joined judo with him, and stuck with it for years.

His inspiration was passed down through another generation as well, with three of his grandchildren, including my son, all practicing judo.

I got more serious about running a number of years ago. When my son was a baby, I'd put him in a jogging stroller and we'd go around an indoor track at the university. He has come to every race I've run, with a handmade "Go Mommy Go!" sign. Last summer, when he was five, he heard about the Kids of Steel triathlon and wanted to give it go — he did, and he loved it.

Now that the snow has mostly gone (though by the time you read this, that may not be the case, given Newfoundland weather), I've started running outside more often than the gym, and my son asks to come with me. He puts on his little running pants and does his stretches, helps plan a safe low-traffic route, and makes sure the running app on my phone is set to tell us our distance when we're done. First we ran to the mailbox, and the next day, a little further. He's at the point where he'll ask me, "Can we go for a run today?" His little face is the best motivation for those tired days when I was considering putting on my pyjamas instead of running clothes. He loves being able to run a little bit

further or faster, and we talk about all the ways exercise is good for his body. He's planning on running his second race this summer, and is already excited.

My son may or may not stick with running in particular, but the chances are good that because he sees adults in his life valuing physical activity, understands the benefits of it and enjoys it himself, he will want to stay active forever. Family and friends are important- essential, even - in encouraging kids to be active, and the more encouragement they receive, the more active children are likely to be. Here is [a great link](#) with some tips on how to be a great role model for kids when it comes to physical activity, and it starts with things as small as choosing a parking spot further away from a building entrance.

Every step, and every word, counts!