Nothing Matters Like Love

A parent’s love gives a child the hope and energy to grow. Nothing is as important for human development as love. This is true not only in the first months of life but also into childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Sometimes parents focus most of their parenting energy on correcting and disciplining their children. These activities can take over the relationship between parent and child. Unfortunately, when a child does not feel loved, he or she is more likely to misbehave. A child who is loved is more likely to develop into a healthy, caring adult.

Make time for love. If we don’t plan to take time for our children we may be bothered by the demands they make on us. Effective parents set aside some things in their lives to make time for their children. They use some of the time to do fun things with their children such as playing, talking, cooking, and telling stories. They also expect to be interrupted in their daily activities to help and be with their children.

A parent who is effective at loving, tries to prevent problems. For example, a wise parent childproofs the house in order to minimize the need for scolding. A loving parent notices when a child is hungry or tired and helps them adapt - maybe by providing a snack or some peaceful time together. Rather than wait until a child is doing something wrong and then getting mad, the effective parent helps a child have many fun and safe experiences. The effective parent notices the good things the child does and communicates affection to the child.

Loving involves listening and understanding. While it is true that parents often know much more about many things than their children, it is only when we listen patiently and with compassion that children discover that their feelings and ideas matter to others. Understanding is so important (and so difficult for most of us) that we offer a special unit on it, “Empathy and Understanding Help Children.”

Effective loving also involves customizing messages of love for each child. Children like to be loved in different ways. Some like to be shown love; some like to be told; some like to be hugged. Each of these different languages of love is discussed in a separate unit.

Sometimes one child may be especially difficult. It may be because of a sensitive temperament or it may be that the child is merely different from the parent. The effective parent tries to find ways to help each child individually even if the child is difficult.

Love is more than a feeling; there are times when we don’t feel very loving toward our children. Love is a commitment to be with, understand and support the development of another human being. Love makes all the difference.
Applications:

Make time for love.


Prevent problems.

Be sure there are places in your home where the children can have fun. You may provide a playroom or allow them to use the kitchen or your yard. Children should have times when they can play and make messes.

Are there certain times of day that you have lots of challenges with your children? How can you prevent such problems? For a child who is slow getting ready for school it may be helpful to pick out clothes the night before. If your children tease each other in the after-school hours you may want to help them get busy with separate activities. If your children get cranky before dinner you may want to provide a healthy snack right after school. If you cannot think of solutions for the problems you commonly face, you might ask for ideas from parents you know who are both kind and wise.

Loving involves listening and understanding.

When your child tells you about a problem, especially when the child has strong feelings, what is your usual reaction? Try noticing the child’s feelings at such times and see if you can help the child identify what he or she is feeling. ‘You seem to feel (embarrassed, hurt, lonely, angry, frustrated, sad, afraid, etc.).’ Let the child talk about those feelings. Often a child can work out problems without our help if we merely help them clarify what they are feeling.

Customize your messages of love.

Think about each of your children and the way he or she likes you to show love and affection for him or her. Find ways to show love to each child in a way that child prefers. [See the units on languages of love for more information on customizing messages of love.]

Help each child individually.

Do you have a child who is especially difficult for you? Maybe the child is very cranky or very stubborn. Can you think of a way of describing those qualities that emphasize the strengths? For instance a ‘cranky’ child can be thought of as sensitive. A ‘stubborn’ child might be thought of as strong, resilient, or determined. Find positive ways to think about your children’s difficulties. Think of ways of responding that work with rather than against the child’s nature.

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