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HOW TO HAVE A HAPPIER HOME

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A PARENT'S BEST INVESTMENT

Presents or presence?

THE PROBLEM WITH MODERN ENTERTAINMENT

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When two of my grown children recently had their own first babies, it reconfirmed something I'd known for years: Parenthood brings out the best in people. New parents feel the impact immediately, both emotionally and physically—the love bond that happens at first sight and grows stronger by the day, and the interrupted sleep and other schedule and priority adjustments. But there are also subtler changes that others are usually the first to notice—that special glow that God reserves for new parents and the maturity that comes from stretching and sacrificing to meet their baby's needs, for example.

There was a time when I was sure that bringing home a new baby would be my proudest moment, and it was each time. Now I would say that comes in a close second to becoming a grandparent, because each time that happens (I have 11 grandchildren) I'm doubly proud—proud of my new grandchild and proud of their parents.

So now that you know I'm a grandfather, you may wonder what grandfatherly advice I might have for young parents, so I'll tell you. Besides the usual "big three"—love your children unconditionally, tell them often that you love them, and make quality time with them your top priority—I think one of the best things parents can do is to let their children be themselves.

If you're like most parents, you want your children to excel. It's good to try to help them reach their full potential, but there is often a fine line between that and expecting too much of them or yourself. Neither you nor they are ever going to be perfect, so learn to celebrate the successes and not worry about the rest. Strive for love and trust rather than perfection, and you'll form lifelong bonds that will keep you together through anything. Happy parenting! And for those doubly blessed, happy grandparenting!

KEITH PHILLIPS

Keith Phillips
FOR THE ACTIVATED FAMILY

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INFLUENCE

By Anaik Alcasas



What many people fail to realize is that the world of tomorrow is what the adults of today make it, according to what they choose to give or not give the next generation.
—David Brandt Berg

■ WAS A SCRAWNY, ASTHMATIC EIGHT-YEAR-OLD living in India with my family in the early 1980s when an old family friend visited and informed me with a smile that she had taken care of me when I was a baby. I felt a special link with her. As she reminisced with my parents, I knelt behind her and silently braided her honey-colored hair. It was my first attempt at braiding, and it turned out quite loose and unsymmetrical. But when I finished and I asked her how she liked it, she felt the back of her head and said, “It’s lovely! And it’s much more comfortable in this heat. Thank you for doing that for me.”

An eight-year-old who thought she wasn’t very good at many things gained a sense of worth and learned the reward of helping others in little ways.

A year or two later, also in India, we went for an all-day outing up a local “mountain” with a thousand stone steps. My asthma forced me to rest often, but it was worth the effort. When we reached the top, we explored a fascinating old museum that had once been a magnificent palace and observed the lifestyle of bygone Indian royalty in the carefully preserved, fully furnished rooms and lush, immaculately kept gardens.

The next day our teacher asked us to write an essay about our excursion, and I became completely absorbed in painstakingly

documenting every event of the day—the hike up the mountain, the monkeys we met on the way and how they took peanuts from our hands and ate them, the massive statue of a fierce warrior at the entrance of the palace, and every detail of the palace itself. I was pleased with my essay and so was my teacher, but she gently explained that it’s usually better to not begin every sentence with “then.” She suggested some alternatives, and I liked the way they sounded. Such constructive criticism and collaboration were new concepts to me, but the encouragement and help I received that day steered me toward a fulfilling career in writing and editing.

So whether you’re are a parent, teacher, caregiver, or “bystander,” never underestimate the influence you have on the children who share your world. Sometimes all it takes is an approving smile or an encouraging word to change a young life, and the love you give will come back to you. ◀

Anaik Alcasas is a member of the Family International in the U.S.

HOW TO HAVE A HAPPIER HOME



Adapted from Virginia Brandt Berg

What is the greatest weakness in most families? According to Dr. James H. Bossard, a former professor of sociology at the University of Pennsylvania who spent 40 years probing what he called “neglected areas of family life,” it is the way parents talk in front of their children.

After studying extensive recordings of table talk, he wrote, “I had no idea I would discover a real pattern in the [mealtime] conversation of families. I just wanted to learn what families talked about, but to my amazement I have found that family after family had definite, consistent conversational habits, and that the *critical* pattern was the most prevalent.

“These families rarely had a good word to say about anyone. They carped continuously about friends, relatives, neighbors—almost every aspect of their lives, from the lines of people in the supermarket to the stupidity of their bosses.

“This constant negative family atmosphere had a disastrous effect on the children, because a high percentage of [these

families’] children were antisocial and unpopular. And this pattern of the family’s hostility many times turned to quarreling amongst themselves. Without fail, their meals were a round of insults and bickering. The children absorbed that pattern, and it caused the children trouble.

“Long ago,” Dr. Bossard continued, “a great Teacher pointed out that what comes out of the mouth is a great deal more important than that which goes in to it.” That Teacher was Jesus, and that wisdom is found in Matthew 15:11.

Jesus also said, “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34). If your soul is superficial, egotistical, and mean, all those qualities are going to permeate your words as they flow from your lips. But if the Holy Spirit has control, the words you speak will be filled with divine light, just as Christ is light (John 1:4; 8:12).

Words flowing from a soul filled with God’s Spirit of love will have a magnetic quality that will draw others. When the heart is burning with divine love, you don’t need to *try* to put pathos or tenderness into

your conversation. All your words will have a savor and a power that comes from an inner depth.

Do you want to always speak just the right words at just the right moment in just the right way so that they will have a lasting good effect? That probably seems almost impossible—and it *is* humanly impossible. But it's *not* impossible when you let the Spirit of the living Christ speak through you.

How can this be? How can you be so filled with the Spirit of Christ that He can guide you in all that you say? It can only happen through you taking time with Him, getting filled with His Spirit and His love. You must take time to read His recorded Word, the Bible, and partake of His Spirit by letting Him speak to you personally in prayer and reflection.

But if you don't do those things, then just when you want and need them most, the right words will not come forth. What will come forth will more likely be shallow, lukewarm, or negative. But if you let Jesus live in you and take time in His presence, soaking up His love and Spirit, "from your

innermost being shall flow continuously springs and rivers of living water" (John 7:38 *Amplified Bible*).

So the root of the problem isn't actually the tongue, but the heart. Words only convey what's in the heart. Jesus taught that our words reveal our heart's character. "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things" (Matthew 12:35).

There is no way under the sun to change the quality of our words except to change the spirit from which those words flow. There has to be a change of heart.

If you need such a change of heart, begin by praying, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10). Then as you spend time with Jesus, the fountain of all goodness and kindness and gentleness, your relationship with Him will deepen and you'll soon find your words to be conductors of His Spirit, making you a greater influence for good in the lives of those nearest and dearest to you. ◀



JUMP-START

A Message from Jesus

The surest way to help your loved ones get off to a great start each day is by starting the day with love. Easier said than done, you might say, when you're just waking up yourself! But if you pray for that extra oomph you need and give it a try, I think you'll be pleasantly surprised.

Don't just eat breakfast together in silence, staring at your plate, the newspaper, or the back of the cereal box. Count your blessings together. Thank Me for the wonderful things you're sure I'm going to do for you that day in answer to prayer and because I love you. Read a short passage from the Bible. Pray for each other and the different things you expect to face that day, and claim a promise from My Word for each victory you need.

Tank up on Me! I am love and light, My strength is unfailing, and all things are possible for Me. Fill up on Me first thing, and you and your loved ones will be ready for any challenge the day may bring your way.

Those few minutes you have together in the morning are also a great time to give encouragement. Tell her how nice she looks. Tell him you're sure he's going to do great in school. Give a parting hug or kiss that conveys "I can't wait to be with you again!"

Start the day with love, and love will carry you through the day. ◀

ANSWERS TO YOUR QUESTIONS

When Parents Aren't Perfect



Q: As my children grow older, it's getting harder and harder to be the good parent I want so much to be. The issues are more complex, and my inadequacies are more apparent to both me and my children. What advice can you give me?

Second, weakness helps to keep you humble. When you are humble, you are more patient and understanding with your children. You are also usually more open to suggestions from others who, being a bit removed from the situation, can sometimes see things more clearly.

Third, you set a wonderful example by showing your children that you know you are weak and fallible and in need of God's help, just like they are. This also puts you in a position to develop a closer relationship with them.

So don't let a few weaknesses discourage or hold you back. You can be your weak, imperfect, human self and still be a great parent. In fact, that's the only kind of great parent there is.

That said, the best way to know what your children need and how to help them

is to ask Jesus. Next to having His love, the most important thing that you as a parent can do is to learn to ask the Lord for guidance in each situation. He always has the answer you need. Having Him as a parenting partner lifts a great deal of the load off of you.

For example, if your child is in a difficult phase and you're losing patience, ask Jesus for help. His Spirit will calm your own, bring solutions to your mind, and help you to ride out the storm of difficulties that may arise. He can fill your heart and mind with His love, which enables you to have patience beyond your own abilities. Or if your child has a habit of talking back, ask Jesus to show you why the problem got started and how to best correct it. He understands your child inside and out, and He has all the answers. ◀

A: PARENTS KNOW FROM THE START that they don't know all the answers and aren't perfect, but babies and small children are so innocent and trusting that they don't even notice. That begins a few years later and peaks in the teen years. The solution is not in striving to reach the unattainable standard of "perfect parent," but rather in learning to use your imperfections and inabilities as steppingstones. Here are three advantages of that approach:

First, when you know you are weak and insufficient in yourself, you are quicker to seek and accept God's help. "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God" (2 Corinthians 3:5). When we are weak, then He is strong in us and for us (2 Corinthians 12:9). Dependence on God will equip you with strength and wisdom that you could never attain on your own.

The secret well



By Derek Brookes

IN PALESTINE ABOUT 2,000 YEARS AGO, a woman came one day to fetch water from the communal well. It happened to be a very famous well, Jacob's Well, named for the patriarch who had dug it. The woman was a Samaritan, from the town of Sychar. From all appearances, her life had thus far been a failure. She had been married five times. Everyone in town knew her and had an opinion about her. She steeled herself against the gossip by putting up a tough front.

At the well, this troubled woman met a stranger. She was shocked that He spoke directly to her, because He was a Jew and Jewish customs did not allow Jews to have any dealings with Samaritans. The stranger asked her to draw water for Him from the well. She was prepared to do so, but being a bold soul herself, she asked Him for an explanation. Why was He ignoring His society's rule and talking to her?

He told her that if she knew who was asking her, she would ask *Him* for water.

He obviously had nothing to draw water with, so how could He get water for her? Was He just playing games with her or trying to flirt? She decided to ask Him some more questions.

He went on to tell the woman her past, and she discovered that the stranger she was talking to was the promised Messiah, sent by God to save the world, and that the water He had spoken of giving her was the "living water" of God's Spirit—an endless source of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, and more.

Those few minutes by the well with Jesus completely turned this woman's life around. God suddenly became so close, so real, so personal, so present, so loving, and so easy to make a connection with. It was as simple as

opening her heart to Jesus. The woman not only tapped into the endless reservoir of God's Spirit that day, but immediately set about getting her whole town tapped in. They may have thought she was a bit wild and crazy at first, but they listened to her. Then they came to listen to Jesus, and they also believed.

God is ready to begin a brand-new relationship with you right now, today, just as you are—and tomorrow He will continue to be right there, ready to take you even further. He loves to make all things new, including you.

All you need to do to tap into the boundless reservoir of living water is pray a simple prayer from your heart, asking for His help.

Jesus, I believe in You. Please come into my life. Forgive the wrong that I have done in life, and fill me with the love and power and eternal life You have promised to everyone that calls out to You. Amen. ◀

No one ever promised me it would be easy, and it's not. But I also get many rewards from seeing my children grow, make strong decisions for themselves, and set out on their own as independent, strong, likeable human beings. And I like who I am becoming, too. Having teenagers has made me more human, more flexible, more humble, more questioning—and, finally it's given me a better sense of humor!

— Anonymous father, as quoted in *Ourselves and Our Children*, Boston Women's Health Book Collective (1978).



Teaching children consideration

By Maria Fontaine



ONE THING THAT KIDS DO ALL THE TIME is argue amongst themselves. Often it is more a matter of contradicting what the other has said, almost for the sake of contradiction. Other times they do it to show that they're superior, to show that the other is wrong and to make themselves look better. Children do that all the time, almost constantly.

They need to be shown that trying to put themselves up by putting down others is wrong. Maybe they *are* right sometimes, maybe their point of view *is* right—usually they *think* they are right, if they're arguing—but whether they're right or wrong, they need to learn it's *wrong* to argue.

Children need to learn to put themselves in other

people's shoes. Ask them, "How would you feel if you were to give the wrong answer to a question or make a statement that wasn't right and someone told you, 'That's wrong! How could you be so stupid?' Well, that's how your brother or sister or friends feel when you contradict them or point out their mistakes."

Give your children an example to drive that point home, how it makes people feel, because they need to realize that. Most children, once they understand what effect their words have on others, will try to be more careful about what they say and how they say it.

Explain, "If you do this to your friends—try to put yourself up by putting them down—it makes them feel like crawling under the rug. That's the quickest way to

lose friends,” or, “Think how terrible that makes your sister feel. She’s going to feel like never saying *anything*. And worse than that, it tells her that you don’t love her enough to care about her feelings.”

We adults need to make sure that we’re not guilty of the same offense. We also need to help our children see that *not* doing this is a part of love—that this is one way in which they can and should show love to their peers and younger children.

Giving the other person the benefit of the doubt and building them up instead of tearing them down is one way of showing love. There are a lot of loving deeds that children are unable to do for others because they’re so young, like cooking a meal by themselves or nursing a sick loved one. But one way they *can* show love and consideration is by lifting others up instead of putting them down.

There are some situations, of course, when older brothers and sisters feel that they have to correct the younger ones. If a little one says cows are blue, the older child feels obligated to correct him or her, but they can learn to do it gently and lovingly. They can learn the distinction between when they *need* to do it and

when they don’t need to do it, when it’s necessary to teach them something and when to just let it pass.

The older ones can learn that distinction. Maybe it’s not necessary to correct a three-year-old’s misconception of the color of cows. She’ll learn soon enough by seeing them in pictures or in real life.

Or when one child does need to correct—in other words, contradict—another child, they can learn to do so in a nice way. “I think you’re mistaken. Cows are usually black or brown or white, not blue,” or, “I thought that, too, when I was your age, but I learned that cows are black or brown or white, not blue,” or, “Let’s go look for a picture of cows in one of your books and see what colors they usually are.”

Like the rest of us, children have a much easier time accepting correction if it’s done nicely, but most children contradict each other in a vindictive, scornful, or sarcastic way, sad to say.

Love, instead of tearing people down, lifts them up and makes them feel good, not embarrassed or humiliated. That’s what contradicting and arguing does—embarrasses or humiliates. Sometimes the children don’t realize this. They realize what it

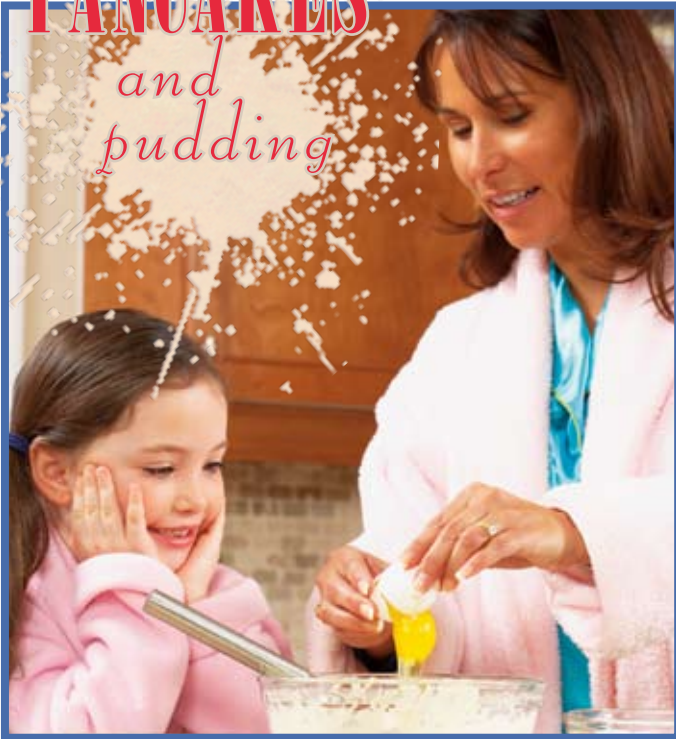
does when *they’re* on the receiving end, but it just doesn’t seem to sink in that it makes other people feel just as bad when it happens to them.

If adults have the tendency to immediately contradict or correct one another and to argue—and this is something we’ve all been guilty of—we can’t blame the children when they do it. But we can be more careful to set a good example, and we can teach our children to be more loving and considerate in this way too. It’s the difference between having arguing, fighting, bickering, contradicting children and children that really love one another and cooperate and work together in harmony. It makes all the difference in the world!

There are a lot of other aspects of showing love and consideration, of course. It’s a big subject! It’s also one of the most important things we can teach our children, because children who fail to learn to be loving and considerate in their speech and actions grow up and continue to have the same habit of bickering and contradicting people. If we want our children to be successful in life, what could be more important than teaching them to love? ◀

PANCAKES

and pudding



By Misty Kay

MY NINE- AND TEN-YEAR-OLDS came whining to me again.

“Mommy, Chalsey’s taking all the LEGO blocks!”

“Davin always gets the best pieces!”

Kristy, my five-year-old was crying. “It’s not fair. I want to build an airplane, but they don’t want to.”

This had been going on all afternoon. It was one thing after another. No matter how many toys they had, they couldn’t have fun. Something was missing. I shot up a quick prayer for an illustration that would

help us to get a grip on the problem.

“Who likes plain, dry pancakes?” I asked. The kids froze and looked surprised at my sudden change of subject. “Who likes plain pancakes with nothing on them—just dry, get-stuck-in-your-throat pancakes?”

“Not me!” they all cried in unison.

“I see. So when you asked me to make pancakes yesterday, you didn’t want plain pancakes. You wanted pancakes *and pudding*.” It had been a special Father’s Day breakfast of hot pancakes smothered in

creamy white chocolate pudding. It was a melt-in-your-mouth treat.

“And when you say you want to play with toys, you don’t mean you want to play with plain toys, any more than you wanted plain pancakes. It was the pudding that made it special. Your friendship is like the pudding. Without the friendship, the game is no fun. Even if you got every LEGO piece you wanted, your playtime would still be dry. No fun. What makes it special is when you all play the game together. That’s when you really have a good time. You need ‘pancakes *and pudding*.’”

The children understood the illustration perfectly and decided to play a game together. It worked like magic. We were stuck in the house for the next few days due to bad weather, but no one seemed to mind. The children played with every game and toy in the house. Any time tempers flared, I’d tell the kids, “The pancakes need some more pudding.”

As I thought more about it later, I realized that lesson wasn’t only for my children. I sometimes work so hard to accomplish the goals I set for myself, and view everything else as a distraction. “I need to do this! I have to get that done!” I want plain, uninterrupted work time, and then I wonder why my work feels so dry and unenjoyable.

How often we all try to eat our pancakes dry. We put such an importance on things we need to do that we forget that pancakes aren’t enjoyable without a topping. We can’t let our work or play crowd out the friendships that make our lives complete.

So if you find that your day is crowded with worries, stress, and work upon work, if you feel you’ve lost that spark, if you’re feeling a little dry, perhaps all you need is a heaping scoop of sweet, fresh “pudding” to make your day complete. ◀

Misty Kay is a member of the Family International in the U.S.

FEEDING READING

Children

CHILDREN ARE A BLESSING FROM GOD.

Genesis 49:25

Psalms 113:9

Psalms 127:3–5

GOD LOVES AND KNOWS CHILDREN, EVEN BEFORE BIRTH.

Psalms 22:10

Isaiah 49:1

Jeremiah 1:5

EARLY TRAINING WILL GUIDE CHILDREN ALL THROUGH LIFE.

Proverbs 22:6

IF YOU NEGLECT YOUR CHILDREN FOR OTHER THINGS, YOU AND THEY WILL SUFFER.

Proverbs 29:15b

YOU SHOULD TEACH YOUR CHILDREN GOD'S WORD.

Deuteronomy 6:6–7

Isaiah 38:19b

Joel 1:3

John 21:15

2 Timothy 3:15

TEACH YOUR CHILDREN TO TRUST IN GOD.

Psalms 22:9

Psalms 34:11

Psalms 78:6–7

LEAD YOUR CHILDREN TO RECEIVE JESUS.

Mark 10:14

John 1:12

ONLY GOD CAN TEACH LIFE'S MOST IMPORTANT LESSONS.

Psalms 25:5

Proverbs 8:32–33

Isaiah 54:13

TIPS ON PARENTING

By David Brandt Berg

LITTLE CHILDREN DON'T UNDERSTAND EVERYTHING that's going on, but they trust you that *you* understand, that what you say goes, and what you say is true; they believe in you. That's why it's so important to handle their hearts prayerfully and with utmost care.

WHEN LITTLE CHILDREN ARE IN A CONTRARY MOOD is no time to ask them anything. They'll say no to *everything!*

RULES ARE NEEDED, but don't make more than you have to. The fewer hard-and-fast rules that merit punishment, the better.

EACH CHILD HAS A UNIQUE PERSONALITY, and each one has to be dealt with on his or her maturity level and according to his or her individual characteristics and personality.

PUT YOURSELF IN YOUR CHILDREN'S PLACE and you'll have a better understanding of their problems.

YOU HAVE TO DECIDE WHAT RULES MUST BE OBEYED without fail, without exception, and what rules can sometimes be relaxed. It takes the wisdom of God to know the difference, so as much as possible such decisions should be made prayerfully in consultation with Him and His Word, and not on the spur of the moment.

IT TAKES WISDOM TO KNOW WHEN to try to persuade teenagers to do what you know from experience will turn out best, and when to agree to do things their way. Sometimes the encouragement they receive from being trusted with the decision or seeing that you're willing to take their desires and opinions into consideration will more than make up for what they might gain by doing it your way—and of course experience is sometimes the best teacher.

GOD'S GIVEN US AN EXAMPLE, and we should do with our children as He does with us. He tries to persuade us to do the right thing, the best thing, but He's given us free will and lets us make our own decisions. Do that, when appropriate, with your children when they are small, and they will be in a better position to know how to make good choices when they get older and the stakes are higher.



A PARENT'S BEST INVESTMENT



A successful young attorney said, “The greatest gift I’ve ever received came in a very small package that was light as a feather. My dad gave it to me one Christmas. Inside the box was a note that read as follows: ‘Son, this year I will give you 365 hours. An hour every day after dinner is yours. We’ll talk about what you want to talk about, we’ll go where you want to go, play what you want to play. It will be *your* hour!’ My dad not only kept that promise, but every year he renewed it. That was the greatest gift anyone ever gave me. I am the result of his time.”

—Cited in *Moody Monthly*

Your children will never forget the special times they spend with you. Aren’t those some of the memories you treasure most from your own childhood—when your parents showed their love in the form of time and attention?

Children thrive on personal attention, and if they don’t get it, just like the rest of us, they feel bad, unimportant, or even rejected. You don’t always have to spend a great deal of time with children to make them know you love and appreciate them, but you do have to spend *some*—and the *quality* of that time is just as important as the *quantity*.

Time spent with your children is not only the greatest gift you can give them, it’s also the greatest investment you can make in them. Nothing else will make a more lasting difference in their lives. As someone once wisely said, “Your children need your presence more than your presents.” Play with your children, read with them, hold them, encourage them, enjoy them. Go for walks or just sit around together and talk. Ask questions and listen to their answers—*really* listen.

If you’re like most parents, you have more demands on your time than you can possibly meet, and time with your

children gets crowded out when emergencies come up. You rationalize that there's always tomorrow for them, but your children need you today.

Determine how much time you need to spend with each of your children each day or each week, and schedule it. Consider it a top priority, an appointment that must be kept. If a genuine emergency happens, you may need to reschedule your time with your children, but don't cancel it. If you find that you frequently have to postpone your time with your children, rethink your priorities and plan, and come up with another plan that will work.

When older children are having problems, they need even more of your time and you need to be even more attentive. Don't be too quick to offer solutions or advice, and try not to sermonize. Hear them out completely before you say anything, and help them reach their own right conclusions, if possible. Then pray and take time to hear God's still small voice in your heart and mind. He's always ready to answer your questions, and you'll be amazed at the solutions He will give. (See *Keys to Toddlers and Preschoolers*, in the *Keys to Parenting* series, the sections entitled "A Parent's Best Friend" and "Listening to Jesus Time." Also *Hearing from Heaven*, from the *Get Activated!* series.)

In addition to the time you spend with your children, you also should set aside some time to pray for them. This is another thing that won't happen unless you treat it as a priority. You have to make time. Praying for your children is a wonderful way to gain a better understanding of them. God is able to show you things about them that you could never learn any other way. You'll also discover how great His love is for them, and that will cause you to love them all the more. He will fill you with His love, which can carry you and them through anything.

Many parents of grown children will tell you that their greatest regret is that they didn't spend more time with their children when they were small. You'll have to sacrifice other things to do it, and in the beginning you may feel it isn't the best use of your time, but keep it up and you won't be sorry. Every minute you give your children is an investment in the future. The rewards will last for eternity.

Being there for your children makes a great difference in their lives, even when you don't think you are doing a lot for them or accomplishing much. ◀

Excerpted from *Keys to Kids*, by Derek and Michelle Brookes, Copyright © 2001 by Aurora Production AG. Write to one of the addresses on page 2 to order your copy.

THE BEST INHERITANCE A PARENT CAN GIVE TO HIS CHILDREN IS A FEW MINUTES OF HIS TIME EACH DAY.

—Orlando A. Battista



If we "train up a child in the way he should go ... when he is old he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6). We need to educate and inspire and encourage our children, and most of all we need to point them to God and build their faith in His Word. If we will do these things and set the right example, they will have what they need to carry them through life.

—David Brandt Berg



THE PROBLEM

WITH MODERN
ENTERTAINMENT

By David Brandt Berg

HAVE YOU EVER NOTICED HOW AUDIENCES THESE DAYS LAUGH THE MOST when the actors make cutting remarks and try to embarrass or hurt each other? That's supposed to be funny. Well, to me it's offensive! When I was young, audiences would be stunned and offended at that sort of thing. Now they just roar with laughter.

You can hardly find a movie or TV show about a family with chil-

dren where the kids aren't fussing and fighting like mad. The parents do it too. Husbands and wives are constantly arguing and putting each other down in front of their children—and in front of *your* children. Because this has become the norm among families in the media, the children watching naturally assume that it's normal and acceptable for families to behave that way.

Sad to say, it probably *is* typical of the average U.S. home, since that's where most of those shows originate and that's who the producers are appealing to. It's normal in that sense, but it certainly shouldn't be considered acceptable. It's unloving, hurtful, and wrong—and it's contagious! It's also rapidly becoming a picture of home life almost anywhere, largely due to the influence those shows have as they spread around the world. Isn't that horrible?

Children imitate what they see and hear, and they seem to have a penchant for copying the negative. Young children, especially, can't always tell the difference between good or bad, and it's even harder when those guilty of some of the worst behavior are made to look so enviable, so "good," in other ways—good looking, affluent, popular, smarter than the adults, and free to do as they please.

Children are in the process of forming the values that they will carry with them through life, and it's their parents' responsibility to guide that process. Parents are failing at that job if they let their children watch what they want without any parental guidance or explanation as to what is acceptable civil behavior and what isn't. And that goes for shows that are supposedly geared

to children, even the ones that are meant to be educational.

Just because a movie or TV show is rated for children doesn't necessarily mean that it's good for *your* children. Parents need to take personal responsibility for that decision. They also have a responsibility to steer their children away from the negative, either by not exposing their children to it in the first place, or by explaining why it's bad and not to be imitated.

What a mess the entertainment world is in! It could be such a good tool for teaching about life, as it once was, but instead it's getting worse by the year!

Today's mainstream media rarely mentions God except in profanity, the occult is intriguing and "cool," and religious people are usually portrayed as kooks. When I was growing up, many movies had positive, reverent references to God and prayer, and often even the most wayward characters would wind up learning their lesson and reforming. Movies back then usually had happy endings, with morals and lessons being taught.

Not now! Sometimes you can hardly tell the difference between the good guys and the bad guys. What I *really* hate are those stories where the evil wins out in the end.

In Greek drama, European opera, and Shakespearean plays there were lots of tragedies, but there was always a lesson to be learned. The Greeks believed that the emotions tragedy released, sadness and grief, were good because they had a purgative, purifying effect. Shakespeare's tragedies were insightful and meaningful. Every *Aesop's Fable* had a moral at the end.

But most of today's music, movies, television, videos, and other entertainment have nothing sensible to teach, no lesson to be learned. They leave you with a feeling of hopelessness. "Everything's a mess! The world's a terrible place! God must be a monster to have created such a thing!" They blame it all on God. Even if they don't mention God, that's what they mean. "Why me? This is unfair! Why does this have to happen to me?"

Cartoons have always had their share of violence—cartoon characters hitting each other and blowing each other up and that sort of thing—but some of the latest cartoons are even worse because they introduce children to the occult and other evil supernatural stuff. I love the supernatural—the *good* side—but many of today's cartoons portray and promote the *other* side, a full array of Satan's goods! It's like stepping back into the Dark Ages. It's terrible!

It's the same with much of today's music and music videos. You can hardly ever understand the lyrics—at least most *adults* can't without really making an effort. But if you make that effort, or if you read the lyrics [most can be found online], in many cases you'll be shocked and appalled at the perversions and warped values that songwriters and bands are preaching to young people through their music.

If you're a parent, you need to take a long, hard look at what's out there and decide if that's how you want your children to turn out, because what they watch and listen to and imitate today, they will become tomorrow. ◀

PROACTIVE PARENTING

How to get the most from TV

- Don't let your children watch unmonitored TV.
- Preview or read reviews on a movie or TV show before showing it to your children. Be selective.
- Strive to make watching TV shows, documentaries, or movies both fun and a learning experience by watching and discussing them together. It will help your children develop the right perspectives.
- Talk with your children about what they do with their friends for entertainment, not in a way that suggests you don't trust them, but to help them build and be true to their values.
- Balance TV with fun activities other than TV viewing, such as playing games together, sports, outings, etc.

parenting by example

FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

PARENTING HAS NEVER BEEN EASY, but all parents have one great thing going for them from day one: Their children love and look up to them more than anyone else in the world. This is an important part of the grand scheme of things, because while your children are a gift from Heaven, they are a work in progress. It's your job to help them grow into loving, responsible adults.

The love and respect your children feel for you are inborn, but love and respect aren't static. They increase or diminish day by day according to how you interact with your child. So don't betray your children's trust. Set the kind of example they will be proud to follow.

If you want your children to be outgoing and genuinely concerned about others, be that way yourself. If you want them to be unselfish, be unselfish. If you want them to be honest, be honest. If you want them to be optimistic and solution oriented, let them see you approach life's challenges and disappointments positively. If you want them to love, respect, and have a genuine connection with Me, keep your own connection strong through spending time with Me and reading My Word and putting what it says into practice. If you want them to have thankful hearts, thank and praise Me for My goodness at every turn.

If you set the right example for your children during their formative years, those bonds of love and respect will be unbreakable, no matter what may befall you or them. They will also be equipped to grow into adults that both you and I can be proud of. Then when you come home to Me, you'll hear Me say, "Well done, good and faithful parent!" (Matthew 25:21, *paraphrased*).

