

# Parenting is Art That Requires Absorption in Role

by Jim Slempp

**The** danger of parenting courses or books or, indeed, this column, is that as parents become intentional about their role as parents, they will inevitably become frustrated with their own failures and inability to put into practice all they learn.

*We torture ourselves sometimes knowing that we have learned much about people and how to change behavior, but we still can't do it all. No longer can we plead ignorance. We are baffled when emotional temperatures mount and everyone at home is tense and harried. "That shouldn't happen in our house!" we lament.*

But knowledge isn't everything. Eric Fromm in his book, "The Art of Loving," pointed out that loving and relating to people involve more than mere knowledge or even skill; love is an art. A musician may begin by learning about the construction of music and then by putting his/her hands to the music, but it is not until the musician is completely absorbed by music that it becomes an art.

To become completely absorbed with our role as a parent is difficult. We have divided loyalties—to job, to community, to friends, etc. We are unable to make relationships the most important value in our life; applying our new relationship skills is difficult.

Eric Fromm put it this way: "In spite of the deep-seated craving for love almost everything else is considered to be more important than love; success, prestige, money, power—almost all our energy is used for the learning of how to achieve these aims, almost none to learn the art of loving."

To care about our family relationships more than anything else means to value richness of diversity that is in a family, to respect the feelings and choices of other family members, and to commit ourselves to applying our skills in relating to the others in our family.

It should also be understood that the "art" of parenting is a difficult achievement because each of us works at parenting in an environment that does not always affirm the family system. When organizations and friends are pulling us in various directions, it is difficult to establish an identity and to build relationships. As parents, we need to work both at home practicing the "art" of parenting and outside the home, to create the social environment that is truly supportive of children and the role of family in shaping a person's life.

## **WAYS TO LOVE YOUR MIDDLE SCHOOL CHILD**

There is no age limit for telling your children you love them. Teenagers need to hear you say it as much as grade schoolers or toddlers do. Here are some ideas on how to do it:

- Make a habit of telling your children something you like about them each day. You may want to do it at a regular time, perhaps at bedtime.
- Sometimes actions speak louder than words. A simple hug or smile can often say more than a lengthy comment.

- Leave notes for your children. You can tuck a note in a jacket pocket, post a note on the refrigerator or include it in a lunchbox. These notes will remind your children of your love even when you're not together.
- Do things with them like biking, skating, back-packing, playing tennis, throwing a frisbee, or anything else your children like to do.
- Attend important events like school athletics, games, plays, and open houses.
- With enthusiasm, teach them a skill.
- Provide transportation to their activities with joy and without complaint.
- Listen to their favorite music and receptively discuss it.
- Make an honest effort to get to know their friends.
- Read a magazine they're reading.
- Give liberally of your time, presence, and emotional energy.

### **RATE-A-PARENT QUIZ**

How do you rate as a parent? Find out for yourself by taking this simple 20-question test. Answer all questions yes or no.

- Do I regularly tell each of my children I love them and hug them?
- Do I really listen to (and hear) my children when they talk?
- Can my children be themselves, instead of being exactly like me?
- Am I available when my children need me?
- Do I trust my children? Respect them?
- If I have to criticize my children, do I do it in private?
- When I have to discipline, do I explain why?
- Is money too large a part of our life?
- Have I accepted the responsibility for the sex education of my children, rather than leaving it to their schools or friends?
- Do I avoid constantly reminding my children of the hardships of my own past?
- Do we as parents avoid parading our discord and friction in public before our children?
- Am I really interested in my children's activities?
- Can my children have real privacy in our home?
- As they grow older, have my children had increasing experience in making their own decisions so the independence of the adult world won't be such a shock?
- Am I letting my children grow up and not holding on to them too long?
- Do I know where my children are at night? What they are doing and with whom?
- Can I tell when my children are disturbed, and respond to their feelings?
- Will my children want to treat their children the same way I've treated them?
- Can I admit my own mistakes openly?

These test questions were designed to see if you have the characteristics 1603 college-bound 18-year-olds said they most needed and admired in their parents. Give yourself 5 points for every "yes" answer—and if your score is above 75, there are many youth who would like you to be their parent!

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