Dear Parents,

Welcome to part 2 of our Character Development theme. If you missed part 1 - you will find it in our October 2010 issue.

As parents, we are eager to give good things to our children. Jesus acknowledges this fact in Matthew 7:11. Then He says, "How much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him!" Some of the "good things" we need as parents include wisdom, patience, kindness, a sense of humor, and a persevering spirit. How awesome to realize that we can come boldly to our Father and ask for all of these things - and whatever else we need to be the parents our children deserve.

Along with all the great material on character development through the ages and stages, don’t miss the featured articles: Me, Beautiful? by Tamyra Horst is an encouraging reminder of God’s love for His daughters, and Re-sparking the passion by Trafford Fischer contains some great ideas for doing just that!

In our next issue of Adventist Parenting we’ll take a look at some of the suggestions sent in by readers for topics to cover. If you’d like to send in your ideas - just click on the link below and let me know what you’re thinking!

Until next time…

Karen Pearson
Editor, Adventist Parenting

Tell me what topics you’d like to see addressed in Adventist Parenting.

If you would like to subscribe: click here.
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Parents - as Artists - to Shape Living Clay

How earnestly and perseveringly the artist labors to transfer to canvas a perfect likeness of his model; and how diligently the sculptor hews and chisels out the stone into a counterpart of the copy he is following. So the parents should labor to shape, polish, and refine their children after the pattern given them in Christ Jesus. As the patient artist studies, and works, and forms plans to make the results of his labors more perfect, so should the parent consider time well spent that is occupied in training the children for useful lives and fitting them for the immortal kingdom. The artist’s work is small and
unimportant compared with that of the parent. The one deals with lifeless material, from which he fashions forms of beauty; but the other deals with a human being whose life can be shaped for good or ill, to bless humanity or to curse it; to go out in darkness, or to live forever in a future sinless world.


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**Ages 0 - 5**

What do babies need for character development? The answer is happy, healthy, loving, accepting, well-rested parents who have developed a support system so one person does not have to feel this pressure of round-the-clock, seven-days-a-week care all by herself or himself. An occasional respite can be provided by Daddy - or a neighbor, a grandmother, or church member, or any caring, tender individual. This doesn’t mean Mommy is shirking her responsibility; it just means that perhaps she can get a three-hour undisturbed nap or a chance to do whatever will restore energy and renew perspective toward the little treasure God has placed in her care.

Children need parents who have a whole lot of common sense plus a little of the wisdom of Solomon. They need consistent, patient, trustworthy parents, who are willing to accept the child through all kinds of weather, who will not force the little vessel out of port, but will allow him to sail on his own natural time schedule and under his own steam. The fact that a child may be shy at this age doesn’t mean he is destined to be shy throughout life. He may make a very friendly and outgoing four-year-old - if his environment is consistent and he is allowed to develop a sense of trust in his primary caretakers.

It takes a heap of patience to live through these sometimes trying months - but for the child's character, it is worth it.

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**Ages 6 - 9**

Making good friends is an important developmental task of school-age children. Friends can be very influential on the child's character. It is important to encourage friendships that can be beneficial. To help a child choose wisely, a parent should analyze the child's attraction to others without antagonizing him. This must be done early and with tact. "Friends" should not be allowed to undo proper training. *Now* is the time to make this clear - not during the teenage years!

It is always best to lay the groundwork well before your child comes to you with a request that you feel is not good for him. If you have done this, then in many cases you can allow him to make his own decision. For example, instead of immediately saying "no," ask the child whether he feels it is good for him to do this. Many times the child can be skilfully led to make a good choice without the parent having to make it for him.

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**The Connected Family**

**Description:** Anything worth doing takes effort, time, and perseverance - including parenting! In this book, Paul and Carolyn Rayne present a practical twenty-six-step program designed to help parents make their children a priority, lead them to make a commitment to God, and teach them the tools for Christian living.

**Price:** $14.99.

[**buy now!**](#)

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**Enter to Win**

For a chance to win a copy of The Connected Family, write and tell us what you would like to see included in future editions of *Adventist Parenting*.

[**Submit your entry**](#)
Ages 10 - 14
The best way to avoid conflict is to keep tuned to your child's ups and downs and to communicate enough so that you can handle the little things as they come up, rather than obliviously thinking everything is fine - only to discover you are sitting on a potential explosive, which is likely to go off no matter which way you move. We suggest that every school-age child needs time alone with one of his parents each day, even if for only a few minutes each evening. Communication can also be improved by starting family councils, if you haven't done so before. Children want to have a part in decisions that affect them. They are much more compliant when they know you have carefully considered their opinions, than when decisions are made by the parents alone.

Ages 15 - 18
Independence should come gradually. It is best, however, if the child knows that his parents have a plan for setting him free so that he will not have to rebel to gain his freedom. Every teenage year should bring the youth a step nearer to independence from his parents. By the time the teenager reaches college age, he should be making virtually all his own decisions. Such a plan is doomed for failure unless from early childhood the child is taught how to seek out the information needed to make a good decision. How to weigh the alternatives, and how to accept the responsibility for his choice. It takes practice to become a good decision maker.

We are convinced that building character is not an easy task, but if one is prepared adequately, then it can be the most challenging and satisfying tasks of a lifetime.

Ellen White sums up the preparation needed by teacher-parents in these words, "As the highest preparation for your work, I point you to the words, the life, the methods, of the Prince of teachers. I bid you consider Him. Here is your true ideal. Behold it, dwell upon it, until the Spirit of the divine Teacher shall take possession of your heart and life...This is the secret of power over your pupils [and your children]. Reflect Him." Education, p. 282.

Adapted from the third chapter of Building Character, by Kay and Jan Kuzma. Used with permission.

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Here's an Idea
Get Closer to Your Kids

Good families don't happen by accident. Victor Parachin checks out ways to keep your children close.

A young woman named Cynthia recalls a high point in her life. It took place when she was 12 years old. Her father promised to take her with him on a business trip to San Francisco. For months, the two talked about the trip. "After his meetings, we planned to take a taxi to Chinatown and have our favorite food, see a movie, ride the cable car, and have a hot-fudge sundae. I was bursting with anticipation," she recalled. When the day for their excursion finally arrived, Cynthia waited eagerly for her father to finish work. At 6:30 he arrived, but with an influential business client who offered to take the father and daughter out for dinner. "My disappointment was bigger than life," she says.

In a never-to-be-forgotten moment, her father simply said to his client: "I'd love to see you, but this is a special time with my girl. We've got it planned to the minute." Together, father and
daughter did everything according to their plans. "That was just about the happiest time of my life. I don't think any young girl ever loved her father as much as I loved mine that night," she says.

That story is recounted by Cynthia's father, Stephen R. Covey, in his book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Families*. Clearly Covey knows that one ingredient common to close families is they keep promises.

You can read the full article and discover [six more tips](#) for getting close to your children.

From the January 2007 Signs of the Times. Used with permission.

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**Featured Articles**

- **Me, Beautiful?** Sometimes it's hard for women to believe there's anything pretty about themselves. Tamyra Horst challenges that assumption.

- **Re-sparking the Passion** shares seven tips to do just that! By Trafford Fischer.

- **Living with bossy children** Helpful tips by John Rosemond.

- **Get closer to your kids** Good families don't happen by accident. Victor Parachin looks at six practical ideas for your family to draw closer.

Disclaimer: We do not necessarily endorse all the content on these articles.

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**Resources**

- **Our Little Friend** Find games, puzzles, the Sabbath School Lesson, and other fun stuff for kids.

- **Primary Treasure** Write to Mrs. Sox, send in prayer requests, find the Sabbath School Lesson, and other fun stuff for kids.

- **Dr. Kay Kuzma** Parenting expert, speaker, and author.

- **Empowered Living Ministries** Marriage and family seminars and books by Jim and Sally Hohnberger.

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Good families don’t happen by accident. Victor Parachin checks out ways to keep your children close.

A young woman named Cynthia recalls a high point in her life. It took place when she was 12 years old. Her father promised to take her with him on a business trip to San Francisco. For months, the two talked about the trip. “After his meetings, we planned to take a taxi to Chinatown and have our favorite food, see a movie, ride the cable car, and have a hot-fudge sundae. I was bursting with anticipation,” she recalled. When the day for their excursion finally arrived, Cynthia waited eagerly for her father to finish work. At 6:30 he arrived, but with an influential business client who offered to take the father and daughter out for dinner. “My disappointment was bigger than life,” she says.

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That story is recounted by Cynthia’s father, Stephen R. Covey, in his book The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Families. Clearly Covey knows that one ingredient common to close families is they keep promises. Here are six more tips for getting close to your children:

1. **Make family your top priority.**

   “Close families get that way because they have chosen to make family life their number-one priority. If you decide your kids come before your sales quota or golf game, you will find that all the other pieces of parenting fall into place. When you put your kids first, you’re getting the most value for every hour on earth. What’s more, you have made the rightest decision of your life,” concludes writer Benjamin Stein.

2. **Spend time with your kids.**

   There’s no substitute for spending time with your children. Just as friendships need time to nurture and bond, the same is true for family relationships. “Children cherish special time alone with a parent,” says Nancy Samalin, director of Parent Guidance Workshops. “These memories are happy ones because they recall times when a parent was totally in the moment and solely focused on being with the child, one on one.”
Samalin stresses parents carving out time for children. She cites these examples: “A mother in my workshop makes it a point to take a 20-minute walk with her seven-year-old daughter every evening after dinner, weather permitting. Another parent has a ten-minute evening ritual that begins with her saying to her five year-old, ‘Tell me four things that were funny today.’ An artist I know spends a half-hour every night drawing with his son. They choose their favorites to put up on the door.”

3. Never neglect these three important words.

Close families know the healing power of forgiveness. They often say these three words: Please forgive me and I forgive you! They know that forgiveness has the power to warm the heart while cooling the sting.

Within a family, forgiveness serves as a cleansing agent. It purges the family of anger, bitterness, hostility, animosity, grudge bearing, and lingering resentment. Thus it is vital that parents set the family tone by extending and asking for forgiveness. Close families heed the apostle Paul’s advice: “You must make allowance for each other’s faults and forgive the person who offends you” (Colossians 3:13, NLT).

In Teaching Your Children Values, authors Linda and Richard Eyre state, “Set the example. Show that justice and mercy are your values and that you, too, are trying to learn to repent and forgive. When you make a mistake, lose your temper, fail to meet one of your responsibilities that involve a child, and so forth, make an obvious point of apologizing to the child and asking his forgiveness.”


No matter how busy you are with your job and other responsibilities, let your children know you are always available to them. Close families operate on the understanding that members can call on each other or interrupt schedules when necessary.

John Obedzinski, a behavioral pediatrician, tells of being summoned from a university conference by a call from his daughter, then about four. “We’d just moved to a home in the country with a stream on the property,” he explains. “Alarmed, I hurried to the phone. ‘The salmon are running!’ Mariska told me. She wanted someone to share her excitement. Such special moments simply can’t be scheduled,” says Obedzinski.

5. Teach children to love and feel loved.

Loving smiles, loving words, loving actions, loving thoughts, loving gestures within a family create an emotionally healthy home where all the members express and experience closeness because of that love.
“Nothing is as important to a child’s feelings of self-worth as the knowledge that he is unequivocally loved by the people who are important in his life,” says James Harris, a professor of psychology at Brigham Young University.

“Many mistakes that we might make as parents can be overcome if our children have this knowledge. Love to a child is like sunshine to a flower, like water to a thirsty plant, like honey to a bee. Your children need to know beyond any doubt that they are lovable, and that you love them.”

6. Use words wisely.

“Some people make cutting remarks, but the words of the wise bring healing,” declares Proverbs 12:18 (NLT). Try always to speak in ways that affirm and assure, not attack your children. How we speak to each other within families will either pull people together or push them apart.

Says Dr. Robert Schuller, “Words aren’t just letters strung together. A word can be a balm or a bomb. A positive word makes you feel good. A negative word leaves you feeling depressed and defeated. Words release energy. A single word can turn you on, or it can turn you off. A negative word can defuse your enthusiasm for a project. A positive word releases positive energy and becomes a creative force.”

When you speak, choose your words wisely because they have lingering power. Consider this partial list of the “Worst Things an Adult Ever Said to a Child,” phrases compiled from an informal survey of adults, in *The Parent’s Little Book of Lists*, by Jane Bluestein: “You’ll never amount to anything.” “I wish I’d never had you.” “Your mother and I wouldn’t be getting divorced if it weren’t for you.” “I love you, but . . .”

Thankfully, adults also remembered the best things adults said to them. The “bests” include: “You can do anything you choose to do.” “You’re very smart.” “I’m so glad we’ve got you.” “Congratulations! You deserve this!”

Ultimately, by working to cultivate closeness within your family, you effectively create a peaceful, harmonious home life where members experience love and support as well as find refuge from the storms of life. Close families know the truth and wisdom of these words from German philosopher Goethe: “He is happiest, be he king or peasant, who finds peace in his home.”

*From the January 2007 Signs*. Used with permission.
Living With Children: Dealing With Bossy Children

by John Rosemond

Q: Our 34-month-old daughter is trying to control everyone else in the family, especially us. When things don’t go her way, the result is an instantaneous and fairly demonstrative meltdown. We either ignore it or tell her to sit on the steps until she’s finished. When do kids stop trying to control other people’s behavior? Should we have a stronger response to these outbursts?

A: If the truth be known—unless you’re on track to become a saint that is—you are still trying to control other people. So am I. It’s called being manipulative, and as much as no one wants to admit it, there are times when even the most well-adjusted, responsible adults attempt to manipulate to get their way.

The only difference between adults and children is that most adults (1) have accepted that other people will cooperate sometimes, but not all the time, and (2) have learned that you attract more flies with sugar than vinegar. In other words, most adults have learned the art of social diplomacy. These agreeable folks don’t throw tantrums when they don’t get their way. They just shrug their shoulders and move on.

Not toddlers! The typical toddler has yet to accept that the world does not exist for her pleasure, and hers alone. The toddler who doesn’t get her way is simply saying, “HOW DARE YOU PEONS DENY THE ALMIGHTY ME, RULER OF THE KNOWN UNIVERSE, MY WISHES!” It takes more than 34 months for most children to accept that the “Almighty Me” and me are not one and the same. (I’ve run into a fair number of adults who obviously still cling to that fantasy.)

Making your daughter sit on the stairs when she has one of her seizures is fine and will contribute to the gradual acceptance that she isn’t the Almighty Me. If you want to hasten things along, however, then up the ante a tad. Give her two free tantrums a day. Indicate that by sticking two “tantrum tickets” (rectangles of colored construction paper) to the refrigerator. When a tantrum occurs, sit her on the steps and tell her she can get up when she’s ready to join the civilized world.

When she gets up, take her to the refrigerator and take one of the tickets down, making sure she understands that she only has one ticket— and therefore only one free tantrum—left. Do the same for the second tantrum, but this time make sure she knows that because she has no more tantrum tickets left, another tantrum will require you to confine her to her room for the rest of the day and put her to bed at least one hour earlier than usual, maybe even right after supper. You should do this even if the third tantrum occurs at ten o’clock in the morning. This
will not cause permanent psychic injury to a child this age. She won’t like it, and that’s the point.

Follow through with this methodically and matter-of-factly, and I predict that she will have her tantrums pretty well under control within a couple of weeks. At that point, reduce the number of daily tantrum tickets to one. To eliminate her tantrums altogether, keep this up for at least six months, maybe as much as a year. After all, the Almighty Me is the hardest of all nuts to crack.

Family psychologist John Rosemond is the director of the Center for Affirmative Parenting in Gastonia, North Carolina. For information about his talks and workshops, contact Tracy Owens-Jahn at tracyjahn@sbcglobal.net or (817) 295-1751.

From the July 2010 Signs
Me, Beautiful?

by Tamyra Horst

Sometimes it’s hard for women to believe that there’s anything pretty about themselves, but Tamyra Horst challenges that assumption.

My husband thinks I’m beautiful. I’ve responded to his compliments in a myriad of ways, most of them not positive. Some of them have even gotten me words of reproach and sad looks.

But I’m trying to accept Tim’s compliments, to believe that he thinks I’m beautiful. I’m beginning to come to terms with the idea that there really is some beauty in me, that my husband isn’t totally crazy. His words make me smile, sit a little straighter, try a little harder.

I’ve never thought of myself as pretty, let alone beautiful. I have too many freckles, an overabundance of gray hair, a few too many pounds, and wrinkles are beginning to etch themselves around my eyes. The list of complaints about my body goes on and on. If I could, there’s more that I’d change than keep the same.

But I’m trying, like exercising regularly, eating better, and reminding myself that real beauty shines from the inside out. (That’s what my mother always told me.) I’m also trying to walk more confidently.

And Tim is cheering me on every step of the way. He walks with me early in the morning or on Saturday afternoons. He tells me how much he appreciates my efforts to take care of myself. And he keeps telling me that I’m beautiful. When he does, I forget my negative thoughts, smile, and simply say, “Thanks.” I’m learning to live with the idea that maybe there’s something pretty in me after all.

God’s love for me

One night as I thanked God for a husband who sees beauty where I can see none, I was stunned by the thought that Tim’s love is a reflection of God’s love for me. If I can learn to accept Tim’s love and revel in it, then maybe I can do the same with God. I can believe that He sees me as perfect, a woman who is capable and gifted. I’m trying to understand that just the thought of me causes Him to break into song (Zephaniah 3:17).

All I see in myself is sin and selfishness. My will is too weak; my courage, too faulty. I feel inadequate, incapable of accomplishing anything important. I feel like I have no talents. I’m just a very messed up person.
But His love makes me perfect. It’s nothing I’ve done. I’m forgiven, changed. There’s no reason to feel guilty anymore, no reason to focus on my sinfulness. Instead, God wants me to focus on the One who makes me fully perfect.

He longs for me to believe that He sees me as capable, and when He brings an opportunity my way, I shouldn’t beg Him to find someone more able, more adequate, more spiritual. I should believe that He knows what needs to be done, and He will give me the ability to carry out what He asks me to do.

Learning to live what God believes about me is hard. What I’ve believed about myself all along is so ingrained in my thinking, but I remind myself of His words of love and delight for me in the Bible. I memorize them, repeat them, and exercise my faith by stepping out of my comfort zone into the opportunities He gives. Believing that He will accomplish through me what He has called me to do, I find that He does.

God thinks you’re beautiful too. He sees you as capable, gifted, and perfect. He knows that with Him on your side, everything He calls you to do, you can do. You are His delight, His treasure, the apple of His eye (see Psalm 17:8).

Are you living in that belief?

Most of us don’t really believe in ourselves. We doubt in the core of our being that there’s anything lovable or beautiful in us. We too easily see the faults, the mistakes, the failures. We worry about the extra pounds and growing wrinkles. We wish we were taller, shorter, thinner. We long for other people’s abilities instead of our own—if we even believe that we have any. We just don’t like ourselves.

When I read that four out of five American women were dissatisfied with their appearance, I wasn’t surprised. Every woman I know would change something about herself. But it did surprise me that only 2 percent of American women surveyed described themselves as beautiful. And that 33,000 women told researchers that they would rather lose 10 to 15 pounds than achieve any other goal.

Any other goal!

It’s an attitude we’re passing on to our daughters. While only one out of ten high school girls is overweight, nine out of ten high school juniors and seniors diet, and 81 percent of ten-year-old girls is afraid of being fat. Two-thirds of eighteen- to twenty-five-year-old girls surveyed said that they would rather be mean or stupid than fat.

But God wants us to like ourselves. He does. He loves us. And He desires us to value ourselves with the price that He paid for us. He paid the ultimate price: His Son. What value we have to Him! In order to accept the value that He gives, to believe the beauty that He sees, we have to
relearn. Undo all that we’ve told ourselves for years. And remind ourselves of God’s love and value.

How?

**How to change our thinking**

I’ve discovered seven things I can do that help me to be more realistic about myself, and I’d like to share them with you.

1. **Be realistic.** We’re all different sizes and shapes. The models we see on magazines are 20 to 30 percent underweight and have had a team of physical trainers, makeup artists, hairstylists, fashion designers, photographers, and airbrushing experts to achieve their look. Most of us are never going to look like them. And that’s OK!

2. **Remind yourself that you are so much more than your appearance.** Don’t let your looks or size be your identity. Women surveyed listed happiness, kindness, confidence, dignity, humor, wisdom, intelligence, and faith as more important than physical appearance. Live like it.

3. **Don’t compare yourself to others.** Comparing creates an atmosphere of competing. We can’t accept or care about others if we’re comparing and competing with them.


5. **Learn something new.** Take on a challenge. Try a class you’ve always wanted to take. Make a list of things you’d like to do, and start doing them.

6. **Watch your language.** God doesn’t like people talking bad about His children, and you’re His child. Don’t put yourself down. Accept compliments graciously.

7. **Tell yourself the truth.** The devil is constantly feeding us lies about ourselves. He wants us to believe that we’re not beautiful and that we have no value so that he can render us useless. Immerse yourself in God’s truth. Create a journal of verses that tell what God thinks of you. Write your name in them. Personalize them. Make them yours and believe them.

God declares in Jeremiah 31:20: “‘You are my dearest son, the child I love best. Whenever I mention your name, I think of you with love. My heart goes out to you; I will be merciful’” (TEV). It’s time we live like we believe it.

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Taken [From the July 2007 Signs](http://example.com). Used with permission.
Re-sparking the passion

by Trafford Fischer

Amy and Alex usually looked forward to their wedding anniversary dinner at their favorite restaurant. But this time, it was different. They stared at the menu and the walls. There is nothing much to say, and the night is long and tedious. In fact, they were both relieved when the night was finally over.

Amy and Alex’s experience isn’t unique. In fact, many couples experience times when the fire in their relationship loses its heat and the relationship becomes boring and ordinary. The usual “get-up-and-go” gets up and goes, and the couple feels empty and lonely. The energy and passion that shaped their early years seems to have disappeared. Passion is very important for a strong and vibrant relationship. Dr. Robert Sternberg from Tufts University suggests that it is one of three key ingredients of love. “Passion is the hot component of love,” says Sternberg. “It’s what fuels relationships, and keeps them going and exciting.” Sternberg also admits that passion can wane. “The challenge in any relationship is to keep the passion going, because the normal tendency is that as life becomes more predictable and routine, . . . passion sometimes dies.”

Routines in life are important for keeping everyday life manageable. We leave for work at a regular time, the kids catch the school bus at the same time each morning, and the weekly racquetball game is always Thursday night at 6:45 p.m. Here, however, lies the risk for our love lives, because emotional connection and sexual intimacy can also get caught up in the pattern of routine. Connecting with our partner can easily become just another thing to have to fit into an already busy week.

Relight my fire

What can couples do when they feel they have lost that lovin’ feelin’? How can Amy and Alex shift their “business as usual” marriage with its lack of excitement and pizzazz back to the time when it was full energy and vitality?

If we knew our home was at risk of fire, we would do everything we could to prepare for an emergency: we would remove any rubbish lying around, clean the gutters, and buy fire hoses. If we knew our car was at risk of breaking down, we would visit the mechanic, go to auto repair classes, and keep a few spare parts in the garage. It’s the same with our marriages. When we know that boredom and loss of passion are a risk to the health of our relationship, we need to take intentional steps to avoid that scenario. Following are some suggestions:
1 **Renew a sense of romance.** Amy and Alex need to take charge and not just drift along with life’s everyday demands. It’s about taking the initiative and creating opportunities for emotional and physical intimacy. “Many couples don’t create any opportunities for fun,” writes marriage counselor Paul Bogacs. “When you ask them what they have done in the last week that was fun for both of them, so few of them can list anything at all. Some say they went to the movies, but that doesn’t allow the couple to effectively talk or share together.”

2 **Build the relationship.** This is about sustaining a sense of respect and honor for each other. It’s about each holding the other as the most important person in their life and advertising that, publicly declaring their love and appreciation for each other. When you introduce your partner to others, don’t just call her “the wife” or “the hubby.” This is the chance to say, “Have you met my princess?” or “Let me introduce you to my number one!” This affirms your partner and also helps to reinforce the value of your relationship. Goodwill, trust, and faithfulness are also vital for building your shared love. In her book called *Safe Haven Marriage*, Sharon Hart Morris speaks of the vital importance of “Heart Trust” which she describes as the sort of trust that means no matter what, your spouse will always value you and care for you. “This is the deepest level of trust the human heart can give or receive,” says Morris.

3 **Learn to “hear” each other’s feelings and emotions.** This also lies at the core of a healthy love life. Research shows that marital satisfaction is highly correlated with whether a person perceives their spouse to be emotionally and psychologically available to them. It means each partner responding in such a way that the other feels understood, validated, and cared about. You know you can readily share what’s on your heart—your thoughts, feelings, needs, and desires—without fear of criticism, rejection, or disinterest.

4 **Avoid recycling the past.** Couples need to keep a strong focus on the present and maintain a warm positive attitude about their relationship. The research by psychologist John Gottman clearly demonstrates that couples who regularly criticize each other will be at a much greater risk for divorce. Gottman shows that we need to offset the effects of one negative statement we make about our partner with five positive comments. Regularly using criticism and contempt in our relationships will guarantee a loss of passion and warmth and build negativity and loneliness.

5 **Learn to manage difficulties.** David Olsen, founder and president of Prepare/Enrich, says that all newly married couples need to see conflict as inevitable in marriage, but it doesn’t have to be the nasty negative kind that we so often imagine. The healthiest marriages can handle some heavy conflicts because the partners have learned to deal with their differences in ways that make it possible for each one to respect the other. They attack the issue, not the person.
It’s about staying on track, staying focused, and knowing when to pause for clarity, when to stop talking and simply listen, and when to say, “I am sorry, I got it wrong.”

**6 Sustain Sexual Satisfaction.** This is an area of love life in which most would be willing to pursue some homework! Marriage counselors suggest that a couple’s sexual relationship is a thermometer of their overall relationship. If it’s all pretty quiet in the bedroom for an extended period, it may suggest a deeper unresolved emotional issue such as stress, depression, or worry. The problem may also be caused by a health issue that needs attention. Or it may simply mean that the sexual relationship has become too predictable. As one woman told a counselor, “I need to make an S.O.S. emergency call on our sex life. It’s the same old stuff!”

For many couples there’s no surprise, no creativity, no laughter and fun. There’s little lead-time, just the usual “Are you awake?” This area of a relationship needs specific planning and genuine creative flair. We need to discover how we can convey a message that our physical love has a high priority. Jesus’ statement, “Give and it shall be given unto you,” needs to apply also to sexual relationships. We need to change our focus from, “What am I getting out of this relationship?” to “What can I give to this relationship?”

**7 Get a regular checkup.** Just as it’s a good idea to get the car checked out every 10,000 miles or so, and just as we get our health checked every year, so it would be good for couples to do a marital checkup at least once a year. They need to discuss their marriage long enough to ask important questions such as, How are we doing as a couple? How confident are we that we’re on the right track? Are we satisfied with all aspects of our relationship— our levels of spiritual, recreational, emotional, and physical intimacy? And, do we feel strong and confident, or are there some areas where we feel vulnerable? Answering questions such as these can be real eye openers that can play an important role in minimizing the risk of taking each other and the relationship for granted.

Any relationship that has grown a little cold will usually have some embers somewhere that may simply need some gentle fanning to get the fires burning again. Don’t rely on just any ordinary breeze, though. Take charge of the task, dedicate the energy and focus it requires, and you may be surprised how soon you’ll be sitting around your relational fire toasting marshmallows and getting smoke in your eyes!

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**Nobody to blame**

Alan and Jenny had reached a point in their relationship where they knew they had to either take control and make some hard decisions or face the reality of a lost marriage. “It was hard work,” says Jenny, “but every minute was worth it.”
“We finally realized just how much we loved each other,” says Alan, “but we also recognized how much we’d taken things for granted. We figured we’d always be there for each other, so we just went along, caught up in work, our kids, and building our financial security. But we almost lost everything!”

Jenny and Alan decided to focus on three things. They made sure they connected emotionally every day for at least 30 minutes, sharing emotions and feelings and listening to each other’s concerns and worries. They set out to delete any criticism (“put-downs”) from their communication. To facilitate this, each agreed to pay a $5 fine for any put-down, and the money went into a “Jenny and Alan Night-out Fund.” They also worked hard at keeping their sexual relationship creative and fresh, with each of them taking responsibility for initiating fun times and surprises.

“We realized we owned responsibility for keeping the heat in our love life. We couldn’t blame anybody else, nor could we blame lack of time or lack of anything at all,” Jenny said.

Taken From the May 2010 Signs. Used with permission.
Q: Our 34-month-old daughter is trying to control everyone else in the family, especially us. When things don’t go her way, the result is an instantaneous and fairly demonstrative meltdown. We either ignore it or tell her to sit on the steps until she’s finished. When do kids stop trying to control other people’s behavior? Should we have a stronger response to these outbursts?

A: If the truth be known—unless you’re on track to become a saint that is—you are still trying to control other people. So am I. It’s called being manipulative, and as much as no one wants to admit it, there are times when even the most well-adjusted, responsible adults attempt to manipulate to get their way.

The only difference between adults and children is that most adults (1) have accepted that other people will cooperate sometimes, but not all the time, and (2) have learned that you attract more flies with sugar than vinegar. In other words, most adults have learned the art of social diplomacy. These agreeable folks don’t throw tantrums when they don’t get their way. They just shrug their shoulders and move on.

Not toddlers! The typical toddler has yet to accept that the world does not exist for her pleasure, and hers alone. The toddler who doesn’t get her way is simply saying, “HOW DARE YOU PEONS DENY THE ALMIGHTY ME, RULER OF THE KNOWN UNIVERSE, MY WISHES!” It takes more than 34 months for most children to accept that the “Almighty Me” and me are not one and the same. (I’ve run into a fair number of adults who obviously still cling to that fantasy.)

Making your daughter sit on the stairs when she has one of her seizures is fine and will contribute to the gradual acceptance that she isn’t the Almighty Me. If you want to hasten things along, however, then up the ante a tad. Give her two free tantrums a day. Indicate that by sticking two “tantrum tickets” (rectangles of colored construction paper) to the refrigerator. When a tantrum occurs, sit her on the steps and tell her she can get up when she’s ready to join the civilized world.

When she gets up, take her to the refrigerator and take one of the tickets down, making sure she understands that she only has one ticket—and therefore only one free tantrum—left. Do the same for the second tantrum, but this time make sure she knows that because she has no more tantrum tickets left, another tantrum will require you to confine her to her room for the rest of the day and put her to bed at least one hour earlier than usual, maybe even right after supper. You should do this even if the third tantrum occurs at ten o’clock in the morning. This
will not cause permanent psychic injury to a child this age. She won’t like it, and that’s the point.

Follow through with this methodically and matter-of-factly, and I predict that she will have her tantrums pretty well under control within a couple of weeks. At that point, reduce the number of daily tantrum tickets to one. To eliminate her tantrums altogether, keep this up for at least six months, maybe as much as a year. After all, the Almighty Me is the hardest of all nuts to crack.

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From the July 2010 Signs
Get Closer to Your Kids

by Victor Parachin

Good families don’t happen by accident. Victor Parachin checks out ways to keep your children close.

A young woman named Cynthia recalls a high point in her life. It took place when she was 12 years old. Her father promised to take her with him on a business trip to San Francisco. For months, the two talked about the trip. “After his meetings, we planned to take a taxi to Chinatown and have our favorite food, see a movie, ride the cable car, and have a hot-fudge sundae. I was bursting with anticipation,” she recalled. When the day for their excursion finally arrived, Cynthia waited eagerly for her father to finish work. At 6:30 he arrived, but with an influential business client who offered to take the father and daughter out for dinner. “My disappointment was bigger than life,” she says.

In a never-to-be-forgotten moment, her father simply said to his client: “I’d love to see you, but this is a special time with my girl. We’ve got it planned to the minute.” Together, father and daughter did everything according to their plans. “That was just about the happiest time of my life. I don’t think any young girl ever loved her father as much as I loved mine that night,” she says.

That story is recounted by Cynthia’s father, Stephen R. Covey, in his book The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Families. Clearly Covey knows that one ingredient common to close families is that they keep promises. Here are six more tips for getting close to your children:

1. Make family your top priority.

“Close families get that way because they have chosen to make family life their number-one priority. If you decide your kids come before your sales quota or golf game, you will find that all the other pieces of parenting fall into place. When you put your kids first, you’re getting the most value for every hour on earth. What’s more, you have made the rightest decision of your life,” concludes writer Benjamin Stein.

2. Spend time with your kids.

There’s no substitute for spending time with your children. Just as friendships need time to nurture and bond, the same is true for family relationships. “Children cherish special time alone with a parent,” says Nancy Samalin, director of Parent Guidance Workshops. “These memories are happy ones because they recall times when a parent was totally in the moment and solely focused on being with the child, one on one.”
Samalin stresses parents carving out time for children. She cites these examples: “A mother in my workshop makes it a point to take a 20-minute walk with her seven-year-old daughter every evening after dinner, weather permitting. Another parent has a ten-minute evening ritual that begins with her saying to her five year-old, ‘Tell me four things that were funny today.’ An artist I know spends a half-hour every night drawing with his son. They choose their favorites to put up on the door.”

3. Never neglect these three important words.

Close families know the healing power of forgiveness. They often say these three words: *Please forgive me* and *I forgive you!* They know that forgiveness has the power to warm the heart while cooling the sting.

Within a family, forgiveness serves as a cleansing agent. It purges the family of anger, bitterness, hostility, animosity, grudge bearing, and lingering resentment. Thus it is vital that parents set the family tone by extending and asking for forgiveness. Close families heed the apostle Paul’s advice: “You must make allowance for each other’s faults and forgive the person who offends you” (Colossians 3:13, NLT).

In *Teaching Your Children Values*, authors Linda and Richard Eyre state, “Set the example. Show that justice and mercy are your values and that you, too, are trying to learn to repent and forgive. When you make a mistake, lose your temper, fail to meet one of your responsibilities that involve a child, and so forth, make an obvious point of apologizing to the child and asking his forgiveness.”


No matter how busy you are with your job and other responsibilities, let your children know you are always available to them. Close families operate on the understanding that members can call on each other or interrupt schedules when necessary.

John Obedzinski, a behavioral pediatrician, tells of being summoned from a university conference by a call from his daughter, then about four. “We’d just moved to a home in the country with a stream on the property,” he explains. “Alarmed, I hurried to the phone. ‘The salmon are running!’ Mariska told me. She wanted someone to share her excitement. Such special moments simply can’t be scheduled,” says Obedzinski.

5. Teach children to love and feel loved.

Loving smiles, loving words, loving actions, loving thoughts, loving gestures within a family create an emotionally healthy home where all the members express and experience closeness because of that love.
“Nothing is as important to a child’s feelings of self-worth as the knowledge that he is unequivocally loved by the people who are important in his life,” says James Harris, a professor of psychology at Brigham Young University.

“Many mistakes that we might make as parents can be overcome if our children have this knowledge. Love to a child is like sunshine to a flower, like water to a thirsty plant, like honey to a bee. Your children need to know beyond any doubt that they are lovable, and that you love them.”

6. Use words wisely.

“Some people make cutting remarks, but the words of the wise bring healing,” declares Proverbs 12:18 (NLT). Try always to speak in ways that affirm and assure, not attack your children. How we speak to each other within families will either pull people together or push them apart.

Says Dr. Robert Schuller, “Words aren’t just letters strung together. A word can be a balm or a bomb. A positive word makes you feel good. A negative word leaves you feeling depressed and defeated. Words release energy. A single word can turn you on, or it can turn you off. A negative word can defuse your enthusiasm for a project. A positive word releases positive energy and becomes a creative force.”

When you speak, choose your words wisely because they have lingering power. Consider this partial list of the “Worst Things an Adult Ever Said to a Child,” phrases compiled from an informal survey of adults, in The Parent’s Little Book of Lists, by Jane Bluestein: “You’ll never amount to anything.” “I wish I’d never had you.” “Your mother and I wouldn’t be getting divorced if it weren’t for you.” “I love you, but . . . ”

Thankfully, adults also remembered the best things adults said to them. The “bests” include: “You can do anything you choose to do.” “You’re very smart.” “I’m so glad we’ve got you.” “Congratulations! You deserve this!”

Ultimately, by working to cultivate closeness within your family, you effectively create a peaceful, harmonious home life where members experience love and support as well as find refuge from the storms of life. Close families know the truth and wisdom of these words from German philosopher Goethe: “He is happiest, be he king or peasant, who finds peace in his home.”

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