

Work In The Home: Building Enduring Relationships

Contributed by Dr. Kathleen Slaugh Bahr
Brigham Young University

Today we worry a great deal about what will foster a child's feelings of worth. My research supports the idea that participation in family work is one of the best ways to do this. In family work, children learn skills, they see the results of their work, and they develop a keen sense of being needed, valued, that they belong, and are important contributing members of the family.

Today we see too many signs that children are growing up undisciplined, self-centered, self-indulgent, seemingly unable to notice or respond to the real needs of others, especially the needs of members of their own families. How have we tried to solve this problem? It has been through "values" curriculum in the school. That means talking about values and doing written exercises about values and playing little games about values. What do the children learn? They learn to talk and write about values. There is little evidence that such exercises teach them to live moral lives. The quality of morality they need is learned in the process of serving others, and typically such learning takes place in family settings or not at all. A child learns to be helpful by helping his father and mother and brothers and sisters. A child learns to see need by being encouraged to respond to the real needs of other family members. If young people do not develop these moral strengths at home, they may learn some through hard experience later in life, but it is surely more difficult. How much better to learn them at home, serving and caring for those nearest to them.

Family work is the essential labor of life, the activity which makes all other social life possible. I believe that family work is the most important work we do in this life. At Brigham Young University we believe that no success can compensate for failure in the home. Working alongside parents and grandparents, children learn to know their parents, to love, respect and care for their elders. And as parents and grandparents work with their children, their love for them grows.

As fathers and mothers work together in this important work of nurturing family, boundaries disappear. Family work provides a common ground that brings husband, wife, children, the very old and the very young together. And families that learn to work together and care for each other are more likely to extend a helping hand to others in need, extending their good works beyond their home into their community and beyond.

Today, people who see the value of family work only in terms of the economic value of processes that yield measurable products--washed dishes, baked bread, swept floors, clothed children--miss what some call the "invisible household production" that occurs at the same time, but which is, in fact, more important to family-building and character development than the economic

products.

The results of this oversight are serious. Many are now convinced that a mother is wasting her time and talents by being a mother. If she is doing nothing more than staying at home and caring for her family, she must be lazy, lacking in intelligence and ambition, or she is oppressed. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Our work as mothers and fathers is indeed the most important work we do in this life. (Harold B. Lee, BYU Speeches, April 19, 1961., p.5)

For the past several years I have had an interest in the transmission of culture through family work. I have interviewed Navajo and Apache grandmothers, daughters, sons, and grandchildren. I ask grandmothers to recall experiences with their grandmothers, what they did with her and what she taught them, what they learned. I have asked them to compare their experiences as children with the experiences they have with their own grandchildren today. The comparisons are dramatic.

An Apache man recalled his relationship with his grandmother. She was old, and as a young child he was sent to help take care of her. He said, "They (your parents) always want you to respect the older people. You never walk over them and you never talk back to them. You always listen and then they cook for you and you learn lot of things from them."

In the traditional way of the Apache, adults were expected to live lives worthy of imitation, and children living and working side by side, doing as their parents and grandparents had done, learned their culture--what it meant to be a good Apache.

Theirs was a rich culture, a proud heritage. What has happened today? What do today's grandmothers do with their grandchildren? Very few have gardens any more; they buy their food at the store. They wash their clothes at the laundromat or in a washing machine. The children go to school all day, play in the streets, and when they are at home they watch television. The grandmothers report they have difficulty competing with the television for the attention of the grandchildren. Only a few of today's Apache children spend much time cooking or cleaning. And the grandmothers seldom tell stories anymore; no one has time to listen.

Today's media-sustained popular climate seems hostile not only to family work, but to family life generally. As family work has become devalued, activities of television and computers and market-oriented work and recreation have crowded out many of the opportunities for teaching service, sacrifice, love, caring, respect and mutual nurturance that were provided by shared participation in family work. I am impressed by Wendell Berry's words:

"In the face of prevailing fashion and opinion, my father showed remarkable insight and foresight. He insisted that I learn to do the hard labor that the land required, knowing--and saying again and again--that the ability to do such work is the source of a confidence and an independence of character

Dr. Paula Fellingham's

Solutions
FOR FAMILIES

Part of the **TOTAL LIFE EXCELLENCE** program

that can come in no other way...not by money, not by education.”

Solutions FOR FAMILIES

Part of the **TOTAL LIFE EXCELLENCE** program

In conclusion, I would again like to thank all who contributed to *Solutions For Families*. Additionally, I would like to thank you, the reader and participant. Without your interest and desire to strengthen your family, my efforts to share would be futile. I am fully aware that the information here is only a small portion of the wealth of relationship-building information available to parents today. I invite you to share with me your insights, your special family traditions, and especially the SOLUTIONS you have discovered for your family. I would like to include *your* family-strengthening ideas in my next book. For your interest, all author profits from the sale of this book go towards making it available to needy families--worldwide--who seek solutions.

EVALUATION

Congratulations! You have made a remarkable effort as you've participated in *Solutions For Families*. Be confident in the knowledge that as you strengthen your family, our world becomes a better place. Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher said it well: "Perhaps the world, at long last, is recognizing that strong families play a vital role in the stability of nations, and indeed the world."

If you have completed the book, your family has had lessons on kindness, commitment, communication, choices, well-being and spirituality. You have participated in many activities and discussions relating to these subjects.

Please return now to the Family Survey at the beginning of the book. To complete the *Solutions For Families* program, all family members should re-take the survey. Answer all of the questions again. Make a new graph and talk about the progress you've made toward your goals.

As a family, discuss what you have learned as you've participated in *Solutions For Families*. Continue using the resources in the book: the lessons; additional solutions for success; the many stories, poems and activities.

If you have any stories, information or "solutions for success" which can strengthen other families, I invite and encourage you to share them. Send your information to: info@SolutionsForFamilies.com.

May God's richest blessings be yours as you continue your efforts to strengthen your family, and as you reach out to strengthen others.

SHARING STRENGTHENS FAMILIES

By definition, family is more than one. Family is never "I," it is always "we." As a family member, we shouldn't simply focus on our desires alone. To be successful we need to think beyond ourselves and give to others. Creating a good family requires service and sacrifice, but joy always comes from loving and serving others. No matter what our circumstances, we can each give of ourselves and share something, every day of our lives. We can share a smile, a warm greeting, a

kind word, a listening ear. Albert Schweitzer, a well-known humanitarian, once wrote:

“Open your eyes and look for some man, or some work for the sake of men, which needs a little time, a little friendship, a little sympathy, a little sociability, a little human toil. It is needed in every nook and corner. Therefore search and see if there is not some place where you may invest your humanity.”

The following story about a sister and brother helps us understand that the most important way we can give is to share a part of ourselves.

The violent grinding of brakes suddenly applied and the harsh creaking of skidding wheels gradually died away as the big car came to a stop. Eddie quickly picked himself up from the dusty pavement where he had been thrown and looked wildly around.

Linda! Where was the little sister he had been holding by the hand when they started to cross the street? The next moment he saw her under the big car that had run them down. With one bound, the boy was under the car, trying to lift the child.

“You’d better not try, son,” said a man gently. “Someone has gone for help.”

“She’s not...dead, is she?” Eddie begged.

The man stooped and felt the limp little pulse. “No, my boy,” he said slowly.

A policeman came, dispersed the collecting crowd, and carried the unconscious girl into a nearby store. Eddie’s folded coat made a pillow for her head until the ambulance arrived. He was permitted to ride in the ambulance with her to the hospital. Something about the sturdy, shabbily-dressed boy, only ten years old, and his devotion to his little sister, touched the hearts of the hospital attendants.

“We must operate at once,” said the surgeon after a brief preliminary examination. “She has been injured internally and has lost a great deal of blood.” He turned to Eddie who stood close by. “Where do you live?”

Eddie told him that their father was dead and that their mother did day work. He didn’t know where.

“We can’t wait to find her,” said the surgeon, “because by that time it might be too late.”

Eddie waited in the sitting area while the surgeons worked on Linda. After what seemed like an eternity, a nurse emerged from the operating room.

“Eddie,” she said kindly, “your sister is doing very badly and the doctor wants to give her a transfusion. Do you know what that is?” Eddie shook his head. “Linda has lost so much blood she cannot live unless someone gives her his. Will you do it for her?”

Eddie’s face grew paler, and he gripped the knobs of the chair hard. For a moment he hesitated; then gulping back his tears, he nodded and stood up.

“That’s a good boy,” said the nurse.

She patted his head, and led the way to the elevator which took them to the operating room. No one spoke to Eddie except the nurse who directed him in a low voice how to prepare for the

ordeal. The boy bit his quivering lip and obeyed.

“Are you ready?” asked a man dressed in white, turning from the table over which he had been working. For the first time Eddie noticed Linda, lying so still on the table. His little sister....and he was going to make her well!

Eddie stepped forward quickly.

Two hours later the surgeon looked up with a smile into the faces of the young interns and nurses who were engrossed in watching the great man work.

“Fine,” he said. “I think she will live.”

After the transfusion Eddie had been told to lie quietly on a cot in the corner of the room. In the concern for the delicate operation Eddie had been forgotten.

“It was wonderful, Doctor!” exclaimed one of the young interns. “A miracle!” Nothing, he felt in his enthusiastic recognition of the marvels of surgery, could be greater than the miracles of science.

“I am well satisfied,” said the surgeon with pride.

There was a tug at his sleeve, but he didn’t notice. In a little while there was another tug, and the great surgeon glanced down to see a pale-faced boy looking steadily up into his face.

“Doctor,” said Eddie timidly, “when do I die?”

The interns laughed and the great surgeon smiled. “Why, what do you mean, my boy?” he asked kindly.

“I thought--when they took somebody’s blood--he died,” muttered Eddie.

The smiles faded from the lips of the doctors and nurses, and the young intern who had thought there was nothing greater than the miracles of science, caught his breath suddenly. This young boy had climbed to the very height of nobility and sacrifice, and had showed them a glimpse of the greatest miracle of all--unconditional love.

There was a long pause before the surgeon answered softly, “You will both get well, Eddie--you and your little sister.”

All who witnessed Eddie’s act of selfless giving would never forget him.

A MESSAGE TO PARENTS

In my desire to share with you valuable parenting information, I contacted two people who have made the study of families their life work. I believe their insights can be profoundly helpful to all parents. First, I asked Dr. Victor B. Cline (Professor of psychology at the University of Utah) for permission to share some of his thoughts with you. I appreciate Dr. Cline's gracious willingness, and I applaud his outstanding work. The information I included below was taken from Dr. Cline's remarkable book *How To Make Your Child A Winner: Ten Keys To Rearing Successful Children*.

Second, I requested Dr. Kathleen Slaugh Bahr (Associate Professor in the Marriage, Family and Human Development Department of Brigham Young University) allow me to share her delightful insights on how work can contribute to family happiness and solidarity. She readily agreed and offered kind, helpful suggestions. Her timely contribution follows Dr. Cline's "Ten Keys."

TEN KEYS TO REARING SUCCESSFUL CHILDREN

FIRST KEY: STIMULATE YOUR CHILD'S INTELLECT

Psychologist J. McVicker Hunt estimates from his research that IQ's can be increased by as much as twenty-five to thirty points or more by proper environmental stimulation, but that it can drop by as much as fifty points in children who are reared from birth in extremely monotonous and unresponsive conditions. This amounts to a range of seventy-five to eighty IQ points...all caused by proper or lack of proper environmental activity and stimulation.

Timing is crucial here because there appear to be certain ages in a youngster's life when the brain is most receptive to stimulation for a certain kind of skill or ability to develop. Miss that time period and it becomes much more difficult for the child to learn that skill later. Since parents do have great control over the environment and experiences their very young children will have, it means that they can play a powerful and direct role in raising their child's IQ if they know what to do and when to do it.

(Some of suggestions in Dr. Cline's book are: Create an active, stimulating home environment; read to children often; provide intellectually-stimulating games, toys and a place for play; encourage participation in sports, clubs, school activities and interaction with wholesome friends; discuss current events, scientific breakthroughs and other topics of interest.)

SECOND KEY: BUILD YOUR CHILD'S SELF-ESTEEM

The vital core of every living human being is his self-image. This picture or image which we carry around in our heads will profoundly influence every decision we make. It will determine in great part the extent of our personal misery or happiness. It will also affect our job success, choice of spouse, the ability to have and hold friends, even our capacity to love. If a child has respect for himself he is then free to respect and love others. With good self-esteem he has the courage to risk, explore, try new things, and even occasionally fail, but in the end succeed.

Accepting and loving our children is important, vitally important, but it's not enough. It takes more than just telling our kids that we love them and that they are great to give them a good self-image. Their personal worth has to be validated by some tangible, successful accomplishments. The child has to do something, have some skills and abilities which bring genuinely earned praise and recognition. Every child has to slay a few dragons - do some tough, difficult things successfully. Parents can engineer this. Our kids also should have the ability or means to influence their environment, have power, make things happen, win some battles. They need to know that they count, that they aren't helpless, that they can change things.

So teach your child to be competent, to excel in some areas of his or her choice and interest, do something better than most of his peers. Also, every youngster needs a special friend, a good person who likes him. Parents can do much to facilitate this.

Earning money through successful work experiences also builds self-respect. In addition, give your children repeated opportunities to make decisions and assume responsibility. This is your way of letting them know they count.

THIRD KEY: TEACH YOUR CHILD EFFECTIVE SOCIAL SKILLS

A great share of our children's future happiness and personal fulfillment will depend on their ability to relate effectively with others. What makes them truly human is how effectively they love, work with, and relate to others. Fortunately, these skills can be learned, shaped and enhanced by caring parents.

I have found six things that all contribute to a child having superior social skills:

- Being truly loved, providing the child with a deep inner sense of security.
- Having a lot of exposure to people, all kinds of people.
- Looking reasonably attractive in appearance and grooming--not being too different, for that keeps others at a distance.
- Repeatedly witnessing and observing the modeling of skilled social behavior by family and peers (parents, invite a lot of friends over!).
- Having a reasonably good self-image to allow the child to respect himself and feel worthy of having friends.
- Having at least moderate verbal fluency, to be able to communicate and carry on a

decent conversation.

Most shy children have a certain amount of social anxiety which makes them feel nervous around other people. They often fear and expect a negative evaluation of themselves. This is always learned. This leads in time to a negative bias against themselves; they think negatively about themselves. Soon it becomes self-perpetuating. They shun opportunities for social development, but this only makes them even more aloof and different.

FOURTH KEY: CONTROL THE USE OF TELEVISION - UNHOOK ADDICTED KIDS

Television addiction can disturb both children's intellectual and social growth. The evidence keeps piling up suggesting that, like the Pied Piper or a magic sorcerer, TV can steal away days, months, and years of a child's lifetime. The latest research documents that the average child spends more waking hours in front of a TV set than in any other type of activity, including going to school.

The average preschooler living at home is exposed to in excess of fifty TV hours a week, according to the Nielsen Television Index. This means that by the time the child is ready to start kindergarten he or she will have spent more time in front of a TV set than the average college student will spend in the classroom during four years of college.

Marie Winn has assembled evidence suggesting that such massive TV viewing by preschoolers may adversely affect their left hemisphere brain development. This is the brain hemisphere specializing in language and speech, thus producing children who later have difficulty communicating, who remain regressed at the level of feelings and emotions. They may operate more by "gut" feelings than by rational, reflective, inner thought or spoken dialogues with others. *(Paula's note: In the Solutions For Families lesson on mental well-being there is a suggested list of things to do instead of watching TV.)*

FIFTH KEY: STRENGTHEN YOUR CHILD'S CONSCIENCE

Dr. Charles E. Schaefer recently surveyed fifty parents who had "successfully" raised their own children to be productive adults and who from all evidences were apparently adjusting well to society. He asked the parents, "Based upon your own personal experiences with your own children, what is the best advice you could give new parents about raising children?"

One of the major pieces of advice given was the need for new parents to actively teach their children basic values: integrity, moral courage, honesty, and a desire to treat others as they themselves would like to be treated. In other words, to promote ethical values and conscience.

The research evidence suggests that developing a conscience and an ethical sense takes considerable time, requires repeated explicit teaching by parents of right from wrong, continual reinforcement of good behavior, and negative (but fair) consequences for bad behavior. It also takes parents who themselves model and repeatedly demonstrate responsible behavior.

If the kids like and admire you, they will imitate your behavior and tend to assume your values when they are adults.

There is a great deal parents can do to help promote conscience, especially before their children reach their teens and get on the rollercoaster of adolescent turbulence and shift their attachments and allegiance away from their parents to their peer culture. Do your homework early!

SIXTH KEY: TEACH YOUR CHILD TO SHOW LOVE, EXPRESS AFFECTION, AND DEVELOP HEALTHY ATTITUDES TOWARD SEXUALITY

Before one can truly love someone else he or she has to experience love. Your cup has to be full in order to share it with someone you care about. Easily the most powerful way for parents to produce affectionate, loving children is to give the kids a lot of T.L.C. as they are growing up. And the kids need to see Dad and Mom kiss and hug affectionately as they greet or leave each other's company or on impulse at other appropriate moments and occasions.

It needs to be part of the family style.

If mother feels secure in her husband's love for her, this helps open up her faucets so she can pour it out on the kids. What I'm suggesting is that the single most effective thing a dad can do to express love to his children is to love their mother, to make sure his wife has her cup full. Then she can give to the kids out of her overflow.

I'm not suggesting that single parents can't also give great quantities of love to their children. They can and do. But it's not as easy and it's not the same as in a complete and integrated family unit. However, the single parent will do a better job single than when harassed in a very difficult marriage being burdened with chronic conflict and divided leadership.

Regarding appropriate sex education, I have found in working with large numbers of couples that a healthy sex adjustment involves far more than having considerable knowledge about (sex). It involves the whole mix of male-female relationships....such things as consideration, affection, good communication, and a non-exploitive relationship. It involves a commitment to the person as a person. And children need to understand this. If you *just* teach them about conception and the pregnancy cycle...you do them a disservice. They also need to know about values and the importance of responsibility to their partner. These are things that only caring parents can give to their children. No formal class can possibly teach or give all of this.

SEVENTH KEY: LIVE IN A GOOD NEIGHBORHOOD

Whether you like it or not the children our youngsters choose as their friends will have an increasingly significant impact upon their lives, values and behavior, especially as they get older and move into their adolescent years. It is also very clear that neighborhoods and even communities or subsections of larger urban areas vary in their character, healthiness, and degree of pathology.

This means you should choose the neighborhood you live in at least as carefully as you

Solutions FOR FAMILIES

Part of the **TOTAL LIFE EXCELLENCE** program

choose your particular house; the neighborhood will provide the peer culture for your children as they grow up and that might make a critically important difference in their lives. A home can be repainted or remodeled, but you can't singlehandedly change the character of a neighborhood. And the relative affluence of the homes in a neighborhood isn't necessarily a good guide to whether the neighborhood is healthy for children. You have to make discreet inquiries to find out. Do your homework before buying your next home.

Also check out the schools. They will play a vital role in your child's exposure to a healthy or sick peer culture and potential friends. There are great schools and sick schools in every community. Avoid the latter like the plague.

While you will not be able to choose exactly who your children will have as friends, you can do a great deal to increase the probability that their friends will be decent youngsters from healthy homes by carefully choosing where you live.

EIGHTH KEY: SET REASONABLE WORK AND BEHAVIOR STANDARDS BACKED BY APPROPRIATE DISCIPLINE

In a great variety of research studies cited in *How To Make Your Child A Winner* it is clear that children possessing higher self-esteem, confidence and personal competence come from homes where parents set high standards for their youngsters, expecting and requiring more rather than less, who in a sense run a “tight ship.” These were families where parents took clear leadership roles, assuming that they knew better than their kids what would be helpful to them as adults. The parents had been where the kids still weren’t. This did not mean that the parents were tyrants or that the children had no input in making family decisions or that there was a lack of good communications. In fact these were emphasized. But these parents had no hang-ups or feelings of guilt in setting standards, giving directions, and using discipline appropriately and where necessary.

However, we must add that there is considerable evidence that different children from the same parents will vary, probably genetically, in their temperament and disposition. Some will grab at a challenge and run with it, being almost impossible to hold back. Others, also good kids from the same parents, will need an electric cattle prod just to move from one room into the other. Parents, don’t fret. This is to be expected and is found in every home in the land. Just think of it as a leadership problem. Yours!

Positive reinforcement can work magic in motivating youngsters to perform and excel. In fact it works better than punishment in most cases.

Remember, responsible competent kids are not produced overnight! It’s a step-by-step process which takes many years.

NINTH KEY: TEACH YOUR CHILD SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES

Research on men who were stress-proof as well as competent and effective across a broad spectrum of personal activities showed these men had early life experiences filled with successful achievement. They were doers from a very early age. This suggests that you might consider encouraging your children to try out all kinds of activities and new experiences. You, to a degree, can engineer their success. You make sure, in an enjoyable way, that they learn how to ski, skate, play ball, fish, hunt, tune a car, jog, raise a garden, earn some money working for someone else, plus a hundred other activities. You fill their lives with small challenges that lead to successful accomplishment. As they get older they’ll be able to handle bigger challenges. Success becomes a pattern in their lives. They expect it. They learn not to give up. They persist until they’ve won their victory. They are not afraid of failure, because they know, given time, they will make it through.

Since each child's brain, like his finger prints, is unique and different, each of your children will vary in his inherited natural aptitudes. This means you should build on each child's special strengths and aptitudes. What is crucial is to start providing these experiences early in life, to set a pattern of continuing challenge followed by success.

TENTH KEY: FOSTER AUTONOMY AND INDEPENDENCE. DON'T DO FOR YOUR CHILDREN WHAT THEY CAN DO FOR THEMSELVES

Our ultimate goal in raising winner children is to prepare them to leave our homes and protection and make it on their own, successfully establishing their own homes and family situation. This requires that we constantly give them increasing responsibilities and challenges, for how will they ever make it on their own if they don't have a chance to try their wings, and sometimes fail, under our protective custody?

The way you teach responsibility is to give kids responsibility. Expect a few mistakes or goofs. Let them make as many decisions as possible as early in life as possible. Let them feel that they count, that their judgment is important, that to an increasing degree they do have some control over their lives and personal destinies. Parents are to cheer the kids on, give occasional advice, and maybe even a nudge sometimes. Let them try all kinds of things. Let them, where practical, participate in family decision making. Put them in charge of things. Let them work for other people, as early in their lives as possible, at things they can do successfully.

BONUS KEY: FOSTER A WARM RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR CHILD BUILT ON GOOD COMMUNICATION

Effective positive communication is the royal road to a good relationship with your child, regardless of age. A father of a large family I knew once shared a secret that the "golden hours" with his teenagers were after midnight. He didn't mean this literally, but he was suggesting that the late hours are often best for letting down your hair and getting close to your youngster. This is when the little one is asleep, the TV is off, the phone has stopped ringing, and house visitors have long since left. The late-hour fatigue factor also tends to open the kids up (and you too). Their defenses are down. It's a time to share, open up your heart, and listen sympathetically. Most teenagers in our current culture are under a lot of stresses; a lot of them are hurting and bruised; they have a lot of unanswered questions, problems, and temptations. If you're there, uncritical, and their friend, not boss or first sergeant as earlier in the day, they may just open up. You might, out of your experience, give them an idea that might solve a tough problem or comfort the wounded ego of a rejected child who earlier in the day suffered a disastrous disappointment or a miserable putdown that rankled deep inside.

Occasionally, I find that a non-communicative morose youngster suddenly wants to talk. It's a rare occasion, and I let all other things go. I cancel an appointment or am late to something, because I'm needed then. Later may never come. My wife, Lois, is marvelous at this--she knows

and senses when the right time to talk is. She'll stay up most of the night if needed, and is glad to. And it pays off, again and again.

There are a lot of books on effective communication, but the most important key, I believe, is that you care. This must somehow shine through, clear and unmistakable, as you talk with your youngster. You can say it almost any way you wish, as long as that is the message the child gets. It builds trust. It enables the child to endure your occasional discipline; they understand that you do it because you love them.

Solutions FOR FAMILIES

Part of the **TOTAL LIFE EXCELLENCE** program

Above all, every child needs private, uninterrupted time with one or both parents, frequently! Take the child riding, or for a leisure walk, or out for a bite to eat. Do it on a regular basis. Give the child private moments, when he or she is the center of your attention, and concern, and love.

While we can never be fully responsible for our children's eventual happiness or personal choices, we can give them a host of advantages which will optimize their chances of enduring life's challenges with grace and courage.