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# HELPING YOUR CHILD WITH THE PUZZLE OF LIFE

*by Daniel A. Brown, PhD.*

Children who grow in a proper nurturing environment have a tremendous head start in life. The difficulties many people have in adjusting to the ups and downs of life are due to being inadequately trained by their own parents. The power of family—what a child experiences in the home—sets a pattern for the remainder of their lives.

Understanding the goal of parenting will answer many questions parents have about how they should parent. The goal of parenting is not merely information or advice. It is not just good behavior. Many parents forget that—they just want their kids to behave so their kids grow up—and their kids can end up with a vacant view of their parents' thoughts about the rest of life. Life is not exclusively about behaving. Parents have profound opportunity to teach their children about love, laughter and the rest of life.

## **KIDS NEED LOVE ALONG WITH DISCIPLINE**

Of course, children need discipline, but by its very nature, discipline is supposed to be occasional; whereas, love is supposed to be continual. Love is a state within which a child is supposed to live; and correction is a periodic expression of the fact of that love. Because we love our children and, thereby, want the best for them, we show displeasure with any behavior or attitude that encroaches on what is best for them.

## **IMPARTING WISDOM TO OUR CHILDREN**

Parental instruction should enable children to come to know wisdom. Basically, wisdom knows what to do, what to think or what to feel. If you adequately nurture your child, then you will help him or her know what to do, think and feel in life for many years ahead. Wisdom warns them against certain attitudes or behaviors. Parental instruction is supposed to stabilize children until they reach an appropriate age to make their own decisions about life.

When our children were much younger, my wife and I stayed alert for early warning signals coming from the kids. When we observed improper attitudes—like self-pity, or one child raising her voice at another—the first thing we did was to get their attention. I spoke the child’s name with a louder-than-usual voice; sometimes I just said, “No, no, NO.”

Thirty years later when my children start going a wrong direction or start giving place to an inappropriate attitude, they tell me they still hear the sound of my voice in their heart going “No, no, NO.” Getting children’s attention—arresting it with our voice, a snap of our fingers, etc.—actually enables them to realize they have a choice of behaviors. They do not have to keep whining or being mean just because they started down that path.

Life is much like a giant puzzle with many, many pieces. When a child learns how to stop him or herself from continuing in a not-good direction, he or she is learning how to sort through all of life’s bits and pieces to see how it fits together. When we work out a puzzle, we must try many pieces to find the one that fits. That means we know when to stop trying one piece in order to try another piece.

By putting an early end to bad choices my children made, I trained them to be very wise. Many adult people who struggle with confusion in their life today do so because as children they were never given adequate instruction. The jigsaw puzzle of life was never put together for them.

When children learn from a parent or teacher that an answer or attitude is the wrong one, they are also learning to be better problem-solvers because they have control over their emotions and tempers.