



# RAISING YOUR CHILDREN

*with Respect*

30 Helpful Tips for Parents

## Introduction

Raising a family is most certainly challenging, especially in today's world. While parents remain the primary influence on their children, you are not the only influence. Outside sources compete for your family's attention and respect and, due to the explosion of the Internet and the increasing influence of social and traditional media, they have greater access to your children than ever before.

The list of concerns grows ever larger as parents say that negative social influences—drugs, alcohol, peers, crime, TV, violence portrayed in video games and movies—hinder them in raising their children with respect, both for themselves and others.

There are many approaches to parenting, and ultimately you need to take the approach you feel best fits your system of values. What follows is a look at some general guidelines that lay the foundation for security, love and respect. Each can be adapted into your own style of parenting, but through it all, surround yourself with family and friends that support your choices. And remember, you need not proceed alone.

### 1. Set the best example.

Here's an old adage that is perhaps new for you: "Attitudes are caught, not taught." In other words, what you *do* is a more effective teacher than what you *say*. And the behavior our children see is the behavior they will imitate. As parents our role is vitally important because our children watch every move and listen to every word. When we display respect in the way we treat others, we show how we would like others to treat us. On the other hand, when we slander others, show disrespect for a co-worker, or in other ways act immoral, each of these behaviors also affects our children. With our examples we are either encouraging or undermining their faith in us. Live according to a high standard of respectfulness and your children will too.

### 2. Be appreciative of each other.

A University of Connecticut study of married couples indicated that the longer people were married, "the fewer favorable personality qualities one saw in their mate." To be united not only in love for one another, but also in mind, needs to be a working goal of married life, not just the starting point. It will require persistent effort to achieve this united front. If you are currently married, set your goal as that which Jesus referred to in the Bible as being "...no longer two, but one" (Mark 10:8b).

In order to achieve this, communication is key. Make sure you and your spouse openly share views on everything from discipline to doing housework. Remember to think of each other as people, not just parents. And as people, realize that your

partner may have weaknesses, while your main focus should be his or her strengths. Attempt to deal with irritations gracefully, recognizing that we are all human and make mistakes. Be a liberal model of both love and forgiveness.

Keep in mind that what you model in marriage will be setting an example for your children. By taking your marriage vows seriously you will develop a Christ-like marriage that shows respect, love and giving for one another. If you respect one another, your children are likely to act accordingly.

### 3. Recognize the value of teamwork.

Teamwork is what makes a family tick. Not only does it teach children the value of responsibility, it fosters an ability to work well with others. This is a trait they will use constantly throughout their lives. While mothers and fathers have distinctive contributions to offer, an entire family that works together can more effectively grow into the roles entrusted to them by God.

Sharing a common goal, whether it is cleaning up the living room or saving for a family outing, teaches unselfishness and cooperation. Parents can demonstrate that mutual give-and-take by making certain that each family member benefits everyone. Consider this biblical counsel: “How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity” (Psalm 133:1).

### 4. Encourage—do not discourage.

Everyone knows the adage, “You can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar.” Parents who stress the dos more than the don’ts often find their children develop a better sense of self-worth. By continually pointing out only the mistakes made, parents can overlook the opportunities for praise in other areas of behavioral development or achievement. A constructive, sympathetic approach can enhance strengths and help overcome weaknesses. This is far more effective than any amount of nagging. After all, children long for reassurance and approval, especially from parents.

### 5. Prepare them to live in a changing world.

Your children will grow up in a complex world. If they are to make successful contributions to it, try to

- teach them to treat all people with respect;
- encourage their idealism;
- praise their efforts on behalf of others;
- place a value on healthy competition;
- point out that new ideas were rooted in honored traditions of the past.

Help them stay in touch with the changing world, and perhaps they can even change it for the better.

### 6. Promote respect for authority.

Authority goes hand in hand with parenthood, but it is effective only when used sparingly and selectively. A firm “NO!” should be reserved for more serious occasions, but sound boundaries should always be in place and reinforced with a firm, but gentle, hand.

Authority outside of the family is also important for children to understand. By your words and examples, you can teach your children to respect those in positions of authority over them.

While you might teach your children the value of asking pertinent questions, it is also important to teach them that people in authority have the final say. Help them see that authority is in place to help us and to ultimately protect us. Teachers, law enforcement officials, and others placed into positions of authority are to be respected—even when disagreements take place. It’s a life lesson that is not often reinforced through the messages of peers and the media, but it is one that will be of great benefit in the future maturity of your child.

## 7. Stimulate them to be creative.

An inventor was once asked who contributed most to his life of achievement. Without hesitation he replied, “My parents.”

It is instinct for children to begin to show curiosity early, to explore and put their thoughts together creatively. It’s part of the way they are designed. But often we, as adults, squelch that creativity by placing our own expectations or interests upon them.

Look for clues as to their areas of interest—science, art, literature, drama, music—and find outlets for them to explore their talents. After all, these may signify a potential for future development. You will help them grow to be all God intended them to be, as you encourage these sparks of creativity.

## 8. Prepare them for making a worthwhile contribution.

A child’s interest in certain areas can be a clue to future occupations that would be an expression of his or her gifts and might indicate a lifelong passion. Watch for other clues as well—a nurturing nature might be a great lead-in to teaching; an analytical mind could indicate potential for scientific research; a questioning nature could be a great asset for a future prosecuting attorney.

Help your children see that there are countless opportunities for serving the common good by serving others.

## 9. Do not overlook the need for perseverance.

Achievement requires sacrifice. Nobody knows this better than the dedicated parent. The devoted artist, the struggling writer, and the selfless public servant all pay a price for whatever they may accomplish. Long hours and frustration are sometimes part of what it takes to grow. As parents, you will have many opportunities to encourage your children in their efforts. Make sure they feel their hard work is worth the effort.

## 10. Help them learn through mistakes and frustrations.

As a parent, it is your instinct to protect your child from anything that hurts. That’s natural, but not always the most helpful. Goethe once said, “What does not kill me makes me stronger.” It is in the struggles that our children will learn a sense of empowerment and independence, a sense that they can fail and still survive, make mistakes and learn a better way.

On the other hand, if you continuously intervene and solve every problem for them, you will rob them of an important facet of self-esteem—a sense of responsibility and the ability to solve problems.

## 11. Keep the lines of communication open.

Communication in a family is crucial. As children get older, one of the greatest challenges is maintaining uninhibited, respectful exchanges of ideas with mom or dad. This is rarely simple. As your family grows, each person will develop new interests. After-school activities, even outings with friends, can take away from quality time spent together. Be sure to make yourself available to your children. Remember, however, that those who really try to communicate will still be rebuffed on occasion. Be persistent and forgiving. Keep an open mind and accept what is being said without judgment. Offer your insights without criticism and teach your children the questions to ask that will lead them to think carefully about situations. At the same time, encourage their inquiries as a way for them to make stronger evaluations of the world around them.

## 12. Take time to listen.

Not everyone can be a brilliant talker, but most people can be good listeners—and that’s an important part of any conversation.

Listening is a lost art in many families. Often members are going in 10 directions at once. Listen with your eyes as well as your ears. In other words, look at your child to let him or her know you are listening. Pay attention to what your loved ones say, and what they do not say, and how they say it. In the crucial teen years, listening parents will be able to keep the communication lines open by remaining attentive to their children.

### 13. Answer their questions.

Youth has been called “an isle of curiosity surrounded by a sea of question marks.” Conscientious parents can come close to drowning in this sea. Questions abound from every direction. Children are feeling their way in the world and look to their parents for direction. If you answer questions patiently when children are young, they will be more likely to come to you with more serious questions when they reach the teenage years.

### 14. Develop a family sense of humor.

Humor helps give life a sense of proportion. It’s the ability to put upsetting circumstances into the context of family life as a whole and to keep life in perspective.

Life has its ups and downs, but a good part of it is rather smooth. Even routine events and activities can be seasoned by sprinkles of laughter.

### 15. Point out the value of civic responsibilities.

Through sound respect for public authority, the family lays the foundation for good citizenship. Young people need to understand that with every civic right there is an accompanying moral responsibility. Instill in them an interest in promoting sound and efficient government—local, state and national.

### 16. Give them a zest for learning.

Journalist Sydney Harris insists, “It is an absolute libel on childhood to say that children resist being taught; children love to be taught, and when they resist, it is because something has already gone wrong with the child or with the system of ‘teaching.’”

Enter sympathetically into your children’s study plans. Take the time to ask about homework and give explanations where needed. Help them set realistic goals and remove distractions. Your interest in their scholastic achievements will pay off in the long run.

### 17. Let them share in family duties.

Show your children how they can help out around the house—from simple tasks for the younger ones to letting your teen wash the family car. Everyone can pitch in when help is needed. Soon your child will learn how to keep the house clean, follow through on chores, and eventually offer assistance without being asked.

This becomes an excellent opportunity for teaching good stewardship of time and talents. As they grow older, they will begin to see the gifts of home, shelter and family as blessings—gifts from God who loves them. Their service then becomes an opportunity to say thank you for these blessings. In addition, they will discover a sense of personal fulfillment and a desire to serve others: “... there is nothing better for a man than to enjoy his work” (Ecclesiastes 3:22b).

### 18. Form sensible attitudes toward money.

A sound approach to money management can help your children realize their ambitions, become more self-sufficient, prepare for raising a family, and develop responsibility for those in need.

### 19. Assist them in making the most of free time.

Children need encouragement to use their free time wisely. While there is nothing wrong with relaxation, spending all afternoon in front of the television is not productive for anyone. Children who use leisure time to their advantage will likely become more well-balanced. Some suggestions for use of free time may include learning to work with their hands, practicing sports, developing musical talents, and even exploring their artistic abilities. God entrusts all time—working and leisure—to us for intelligent, responsible use.

## 20. Be a friend to their friends.

Hundreds of teenagers who replied to the question, “What are the qualities of a true friend?” put loyalty at the top of the list. Other leading attributes were understanding, unselfishness, patience, respect, honesty, dependability and self-control. It is reassuring that so many youth look for the very qualities in others their parents want to see in them.

No one—including any of your children’s friends—is perfect. Comment favorably on them whenever possible; express your reservations about them only when necessary. Make your home a place where they and their companions feel welcome.

## 21. Provide wholesome sex instruction.

According to *Report* magazine, “Recent surveys of high school students show that only one in 20 has actually received sex instruction from his parents. And even among those who did, there are frequent complaints that their talks were ‘uncomfortable,’ ‘too little, too late,’ or ‘insufficient.’”

The wonder of God’s design for man and woman should accompany one’s growing knowledge of his sexuality. Church and school supplement—but never replace—the parents’ role in giving adequate and careful instruction. The obligation is a serious one and, especially in today’s world of open sexuality, should not be taken lightly.

## 22. Tell them about the nature of true love.

It is an essential need of everyone to feel loved. And there is no greater sense of love than that which God has shown to us through Jesus. God’s love is unconditional—it is not dependent on anything we do to earn it; He freely gives it to us. Isn’t that what you want for your child—to feel totally and unconditionally loved?

We can’t do that on our own; we would only fail. But God does it for us. He sent Jesus to take all of our imperfections to the cross, where He died for each and every sin. Now we can live as loved and forgiven children of God, and we can lead our children to know the nature of God’s love as the deepest, truest love of all.

## 23. Nourish their spiritual life.

It is an awesome responsibility to make sure your child is brought up knowing God’s love. When dealing with younger children, it is easier for them to uncomprehendingly trust what you believe. But as they grow older, teenagers are more apt to question faith. They are quick to spot any gap between precept and action. If you attend church regularly—not out of routine, but because you really want to worship God—they will too.

Prayer before and after meals can be a daily reminder of our complete and joyful dependence on the Lord. Reading aloud during devotions from an easy-to-understand Bible is another way to bring home the personal reality of Jesus Christ as Savior and Friend to your family.

## 24. Model forgiveness.

We all make mistakes. As much as we want to do what’s right, we often don’t. That’s the nature of sin. Thankfully, God has solved this problem for us through Christ Jesus: “But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

In our families this means we don’t have to be burdened by mistakes we make or those that others make that hurt us. By God’s gift of forgiveness, we can move past mistakes and try again. We can readily teach our children to say, “I’m sorry” and “I forgive you.” And we can readily say these words ourselves. For God gives us the power to love and to forgive: “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32).

## 25. Help them acquire a sense of mission.

“Find a mission in life and take it seriously!” was the advice the late Dr. William Menninger repeated to his patients. It is crucial to keep before young people the intensely hopeful fact that God has given each of them a role in life that He has assigned to no one else. Help them see that He wants them to collaborate with Him in bringing divine values into human affairs. This missionary dimension will flourish in a family that sincerely works at it.

## 26. Guide them toward maturity.

Intellectual, emotional and spiritual maturity demand painstaking effort. As you encourage your child along these lines, remember that everyone matures at different rates. In fact, girls often mature faster than boys. And maturity is not necessarily linked to age. A person can be young and mature, old and immature. No one can make someone else mature, but your children rightly look to you for guidance.

## 27. Give them a vision.

“Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint,” says Proverbs 29:18a. This surely applies to our age with its scientific achievements, social upheavals and unprecedented opportunities. Young people need to be encouraged to think, pray and work in terms of the whole world, instead of their own backyard. Mankind will benefit. And you will have lived up to your God-given task.

## 28. Teach them to prepare for their own homes.

A bride-to-be once exclaimed, “When I get married, I’ll become another person!” This is seldom, if ever, true. Young people carry into marriage certain long-standing attitudes and habits. These will be put to the test when they set up their own homes.

Future responsibilities demand not only an increased capacity for love, but also a working knowledge of the qualities and skills necessary for running well-managed homes.

Take a careful look at what you are teaching; remember that your children can and do learn these all-important skills from you.

## 29. Reach out to the world.

By giving your children strongly rooted values, a sense of balance and judgment, a willingness to accept the challenges of life, and a desire to share the blessings of Christ with others, you are giving them a ticket to the world. With these skills your children can grow in their stewardship toward the wider world. It is up to you to create a home life in which young people can grow.

## 30. Above all, love and be loved.

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