

BALANCING PARENTING WITH WORK

SESSION 1:

Time & Commitment:

More and more time is being spent away from the family home transporting children and adolescents to extra-curricular activities, etc. The family meal tends to be fast food in the back of the van while speeding to the next activity. Parents of the 90's are supplementing their children's daily activities with many things outside the home and fail to have time and/or energy to spend finding out what is happening with their child.

It has been found that children whose parents spend at least six hours a day with them on work days give their mothers and fathers top grades for making them feel loved and important. Two issues loomed large in the study: whether parents were giving their children "focused" time, and whether dad was gainfully employed. This study found that both the amount of time and the quality of the interaction were important to children. Not surprising, older children were more likely to focus on how time was spent. Were parents listening to them? Did parents understand their adolescents' day-to-day lives? Were parents too overwhelmed, too stressed by work and financial matters to spend a few hours a day tuning in?

They found that the quantity of time with mothers and fathers does matter a great deal. Children who spend more time with their parents on workdays and non-workdays grade their parents higher. They feel their parents are more successful in managing work and family, and they also feel that their parents are putting them first.

The statistics were striking in this study. Eighty-three percent of children whose parents spent a minimum of six hours per day with them on working days gave their mothers top grades for making them feel loved and important. Additionally, 84 percent of the children gave fathers high marks for spending a minimum of six hours per day with them.

Who spends more time with their children? According to this research study, mothers spend more time with children from birth to age 18 than fathers. They found that more than twice as many mothers (33 percent) spent 4.5 hours or more on workdays with their children than fathers (15 percent).

Another important feature that seem to be lacking in the family is the family meal. According to a recent statistics only 30% of American families eat meals together and then no more than 1 or 2 times per week

- In 1970 the average number of meals families shared together was 2, by 1979 1, between 1976 and 1986 the number declined 15% and today it is very low
- The trend of sharing fewer meals together is part of the overall trend of parents spending less time than they used to with their children
- In recent research today's parents were found to spend 40% less time with their children than parents did in 1965
- research continues to show the importance of family rituals like mealtime, especially for kids
- these rituals give children a sense of security and a sense of how their family works together

THE FACTS:

- The number of days per week that adolescents ate meals with their families was a more powerful predictor of whether or not they were adjusted (less likely to take drugs, less likely to be depressed, more motivated at school, and having better peer relationships) than was age, gender or family type
- When children of alcoholics have family dinners, they are less likely to become alcoholics themselves
- There is a positive relationship between elementary school students' academic success and at-home meals with their family
- Children develop important social skills during the family meal, such as table manners, taking turns speaking and listening to the person talking
- Eating together promotes good communication, strengthens family bonds and relationships, teaches family values, improves nutrition, helps families solve problems and learn about each other, saves money, brings order and structure to families and allows for discussion of family needs and plans for activities
- College students with meaningful family rituals, such as family meals cope better with freshman year stresses
- The single factor common to best readers from elementary through high school is that families eat together at home

HOW TO MAKE IT HAPPEN:

- Encourage everyone to participate in the cooking and table setting, everyone should have a meal-related job
- Remember the important thing is to eat together not have a gourmet meal together
- Make sure everyone who is home is seated before beginning the meal – start together – if someone is coming home late perhaps you can at least have dessert together
- TURN OFF THE TV – over of American families leave the television on during dinner, severely interfering with conversation
- Reading during the meals is also not allowed
- Engage everyone in conversation, even the youngest family member
- Ask questions that will be more than one word answers – keep lines of communication open by not criticizing each other – avoid disciplinary discussions until a later time

- Get everyone involved in the clean-up process as they did in the table set up process
- Take the phone off the hook so you won't be disturbed
- Eat facing each other
- DON'T RUSH THE MEAL

There is also some significant concern about the families that have both parents that work outside of the home. Women currently represent half the work force and 39% of the professional labor force

- US Census Bureau found that the number of women in executive, administrative and managerial occupations increased by 95% from 1980 to 1995
- More women today are pursuing Master's degrees than men and it is predicted that by the year 2001, more women than men will be pursuing doctoral degrees
- Research shows us that dual career couples represent the largest segment of workers at all major corporations with estimates that these couples represent 60% to 70% of current employees and it is expected that this will rise to 85% within the next decade
- The Dual Career Couple is here to stay and there is a great deal that they have to learn for them to remain as couples

- The majority of concerns expressed by couples fall into three broad areas:

1. ***Work-Related Challenges:***

- It is rarely the case that careers develop in tandem
- More often one partner's career is taking off while the other's is in a temporary holding pattern
- These imbalances can create tension since one partner is being required to put in extra time and energy to take advantage of significant career opportunities, while the other is left to pick up the slack at home
- Questions regarding whose needs are more important are raised and if not properly addressed, the perceived inequities can quickly turn into feelings of resentment
- Couples who do not actively plan how they will work through the stresses of unparalleled career paths are likely to experience significant relationship problems

2. ***Family-Related Challenges:***

- The division of household duties is a major issue for most couples
- In 80% of the couples, women perform 70% to 80% of the household chores, however attempts to protect a traditional division of duties eventually creates an overload situation for women
- Given the time and energy devoted to working outside the home, a serious question facing dual career couples is whether to have children or not
- If a couple does decide to have children, timing may be critical

- Starting a family at an early stage in one's career can have a negative impact and if the couple waits too long, age can be a problem
- Dual career couples who do not discuss their expectations of each other with regard to family and parenting issues run the risk of putting their relationship in jeopardy

3. *Personal Challenges:*

- The personal and career challenges facing men and women are distinctly different
- Women do not make decisions about work without considering the implication for the families
- Men view work and family roles are independent
- Working women often struggle with feelings of guilt at having to make the choice to work outside the home
- Women may receive little to no support from their families or from society which may label them as selfish
- As the demands and expectations of work, home and family pile up, working women may feel they are losing control of their lives
- Men are adjusting to the fact that they are no longer the sole provider in the family
- Their financial contributions to the family as well as their career accomplishments may be equaled or possibly surpassed by their wives
- In a society that still defines masculinity in terms of achievement outside the home, husbands may feel a sense of loss in their new role
- Time for leisure and social activities is sometimes rare for dual career couples – when they are not managing the demands of their working lives, they are struggling to create quality time for children or each other
- This may leave little time for relationships outside the immediate family
- When couples are finally able to arrange time out for themselves or with friends, the occasion is often overshadowed by feelings of guilt

Possible Solutions:

1. *Clarify Roles and Expectations:*

- Communication is the foundation of any relationship
- A good starting point for couples who want to enhance their relationships is to spend time sharing their career aspirations with each other
- This kind of communication highlights potential conflicting goals and can open the door to a continuing process of compromise and negotiation that marks effective dual worker relationships

2. *Setting Priorities:*

- The outcome of clarifying roles and expectations is finding common ground with respect to what is most important
 - Dual career couples who have learned to manage the challenges of their lifestyle successfully, prioritize what means the most to each partner and to the relationship will more than likely be successful in their endeavors and succeed in making their marriage work
3. ***Develop Process Skills:***
- Many couples put more energy into their wedding day than into any part of their relationship
 - The test of their relationship will come in their ability to work through the realities of who takes out the garbage, who makes the lunches, who picks up the kids after soccer practice and who get the car
 - These decision and divisions are all a matter of process
 - Couples who value good process tend to experience good outcomes when confronted with the challenges of daily living
4. ***Be Creative:***
- Solutions to the challenges of dual-working living are as unique as the individuals who choose this lifestyle
 - There is no master blueprint to overcoming the obstacles that face these couples
 - Flexibility is the hallmark of a creative couple
 - The willingness to look at situations from different perspectives and to experiment with new ways of doing things is an essential quality among partners who want to balance work and family roles
5. ***Exercise Forgiveness Freely:***
- Dual career couples should recognize that mistakes happen and that forgiveness needs to be exercised freely if the relationship is to survive
 - It is not enough to tolerate differences, couples must be able to manage this lifestyle and learn to forgive and forget

After examining the role of mother's in the home – it seems important to also examine what role father's play in the family.

- There is increasing evidence that the traditional role for Dad is changing and he is needed more at home, not only are men healthier, but so are their sons, daughters and wives
- Old Buddhist saying “ *A child without a father is like a house without a roof*”

- A recent study (1996) found that today's fathers average 8 minutes per day with their children on weekdays and 14 minutes per day on weekends
- Census Bureau (1991) found that fathers are the primary caregivers for 1/5 of all American preschool children whose mothers worked
- 3 years earlier it was 1 in 7 children under age 5 were in their fathers' primary care

"Wait till your father gets home!" used to be a mother's ultimate threat. But with the two-parent household becoming less and less common, according to recent research. This study found that even when fathers do not live at home, children whose fathers are actively involved in their lives tend to have better cognitive and language skills and fewer behavior problems. They found that fathers who are involved with their children have children with fewer problems. That added involvement from a father helps children tremendously.

The researchers wanted to see how aspects of father involvement were related to the children's cognitive development, language ability, and behavior. They found that both mothers' and fathers' satisfaction with parenting were significantly related to the children's cognitive abilities and to their behavior. Whether the father lived with the child was not related to either of these factors. Maternal education and whether fathers contributed financially were also predictive of the children's language development and behavior. And where fathers lived with the child, "the home was more child-centered," according to the report.

This research concluded that the importance of father-child interaction to children's well-being is very important. This study also note that rather than just looking at whether the biological father lives with the child, researchers need to consider father roles from functional and cultural perspectives. Fathers definitely play an important part in children's development. I think these results show that our society should develop family-oriented policies and programs that promote positive father involvement.

How Dads Benefit:

- Men who live alone are in the high risk for suicide
- Marriage protects men from depression, being married tends to benefit both men and women, but men more so
- Men with wives report a greater sense of well being than single men
- A study completed in 1997 found that men who do housework are less stressed and a man's attachment to his children in the early stages can result in lower divorce rates

How Families Benefit:

- When families are examined we still often find Mom still being the most involved with children and the home tasks
- With more Moms working alongside Dads, traditional roles are getting increasingly blurred

- Parenting with your spouse works better
- Discipline with the combination of what Mom and Dad have to offer brings forth merciful justice with Dad's focus on justice and Mom's focus on mercy

How Sons Benefit:

- Boys with strong, warm and nurturing fathers are more socially competent, more persistent at solving problems and more self-directed
- When fathers' are not present either physically or emotionally, boys tend to be more aggressive and less compliant and have greater problems in school
- When fathers are not present these boys have problems with peer relationships, tending either to play alone or play with younger children
- Some studies have shown that 70% of all juvenile delinquents placed in reform institutions come from fatherless homes

How Daughters Benefit:

- A study completed in 1996 of college-aged women and their fathers found that in families that fathers were insensitive, unaffectionate and unavailable that these women were more likely to be depressed
- Some daughters express their hunger for their fathers' during their adolescence by becoming "boy crazy" or in adulthood by being drawn to men like Dad
- Daughters who had fathers they could count on the most were found to be more likely to be drawn to men who treated them well

Keys to Successful Fathering:

1. **Be Involved:** that can be paying attention and helping with your child's daily routine
2. **Be Consistent:** decide (with your co-parent) which rules are bendable and which are not and maintain consistency with the unbendable ones
3. **Be Aware:** of what is important to your child, it may not matter to them who was last year's Super Bowl winner
4. **Be Nurturing:** show affection, don't reserve hugs and pats on the back for only when it is expected or for more intimate times with your wife

Discipline:

Many parents seem to have significant difficulties with being consistent and structured in dealing with problems in their family. The presentation teaches ways to use consequences and problem solving as alternative approaches to handled conflicts. Information and techniques to move the focus of the problem to make the child/adolescent responsible for their actions and not the parent(s).

Parents are consistently faced with the challenge of managing their children's behavior.

You can almost hear yourself saying these phrases:

"My child never listens to me!"

"She won't pick up her toys!"

"He won't clean his room!"

Such frustrated exclamations are all too familiar to many parents. This seems to be the major area of concern for all parents – BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT. When considering behavior management, adults often tend to focus on how children control (or do not control) themselves. However, by observing effective managers in a business setting, for example, we realize that effective management is implemented by the individuals in charge, not by the people being managed. Effective behavior management is not so much about what children do. Instead, it involves adults' behavior, and research shows that adults vary in both discipline and caregiving styles.

Discipline Styles

One common misconception about discipline is that discipline is synonymous with punishment. The Latin root of the word discipline, however, means "instruction" or "knowledge." Thus, discipline is really a process by which adults teach children and convey knowledge about appropriate behavior for various situations. However, some methods of discipline are better at achieving this than others. Research suggests that there are at least three discipline styles. The first, Power Assertive Discipline involves such adult behavior as spanking, withdrawal of privileges, and threats of punishment or physical harm. Children respond to adults' requests out of fear, rather than respect. Consequently, children's motivations for appropriate behavior are external, and they conform to expectations to avoid punishment. However, when children find themselves in situations where they will not be "caught," they are likely to engage in inappropriate behavior.

The second discipline style, Love Withdrawal, involves such adult behavior as refusals to speak or listen to children, threats to leave children, or expressions of dislike and disappointment. Adults who practice this discipline style often give children the proverbial "cold shoulder" when inappropriate behavior occurs. As a consequence, children conform to expectations because they fear abandonment or the loss of adults' love and affection. Like power-assertive discipline, love withdrawal produces external motivation for appropriate behavior.

The third discipline style, Induction, incorporates the true nature of discipline: teaching. Adults who practice induction provide children explanations for appropriate behavior as well as reasonable consequences for inappropriate behavior. Because children understand WHY certain actions are expected of them and others are prohibited, they internalize reasons for these behaviors. As a result, children's motivation to behave appropriately comes from within, and they are more likely to engage in expected behaviors even when they are in situations where they are not being watched and thus will not be "caught." An additional benefit of induction is that children will be more likely to understand the effects of their behaviors on others and exhibit empathy.

Research on discipline and caregiving styles indicates that cooperative communication is crucial in adults' interactions with children. Effective caregivers clearly convey high expectations to children and provide reasons for expected behaviors, while remaining receptive to the perspectives, suggestions, and needs of children. Additionally, effective caregivers are nurturing and responsive to children, even when mistakes occur, because they view discipline as a teaching and learning process.

Of course in some families children are more difficult and tend to be very aggressive. It has been found that when it comes to aggressive behavior, the foremost role models for children are their parents. Despite the outside influence of the media and their peers, what kids see at home is the biggest determinant of how they behave.

What has consistently been found is that children who lived with both parents had significantly lower aggression scores. The better students got along with their parents, the less likely they were to fight. The more parents monitored students' activities and friends, the less aggressive their behavior. They noted a strong correlation between a student's aggression and how he perceived his parents felt about fighting. It has also been found that even though students who lived with both parents had the lowest aggression scores, low parental monitoring, poor relationship with parents, and perceived parental support for fighting were more predictive of aggression than family structure.

Some parents use physical punishment as a mean of behavior control. What has been found is that children spanked by their parents are twice as likely to develop drug and alcohol problems in adulthood. What has also been found through continued research is that children who were spanked or slapped had increased rates of anxiety disorders, anti-social behavior and depression.

Ten Reasons Not To Hit Your Kids:

- For the past several years, many psychiatrist, psychologists and social workers and parents have recommended that we seriously consider banning the physical punishment of children. The most important reason for this is that *“all people have the right to protection of their physical integrity, and children are people too.”*
1. ***Hitting children teaches them to become hitters themselves.***
 - Extensive research data is now available to support a direct correlation between corporal punishment in children and aggressive or violent behavior in the teenage and adult years. Virtually all of the most dangerous criminals were regularly threatened and punished in childhood
 2. ***Physical punishment gives the dangerous and unfair message that “might makes right.”***

- This may suggest that it is permissible to hurt someone else, provided they are smaller and less powerful than you are. The child then concludes that it is permissible to mistreat younger or smaller children. When he/she becomes an adult, he/she can feel little compassion for those less fortunate than he/she is, and fears those who are more powerful. This could hinder the establishment of meaningful relationships so essential to an emotionally fulfilling life.
3. ***Because children learn through parental modeling, physical punishment gives the message that hitting is an appropriate way to express feeling and solve problems.***
 - If a child does not observe a parent solve problems in a creative and humane way, it can be difficult for him/her to learn to do this for themselves. For this reason, unskilled parenting often continues into the next generation.
 4. ***“Spare the rod and spoil the child”, though much quoted is in fact a misinterpretation of Biblical teachings.***
 - While the “rod” is mentioned many times in the Bible, it is only in the Book of Proverbs that it is used in connection with parenting. One must remember that the Bible discusses the fact that children were seen as being close to God and it was urged never to unjustly punish or harm them.
 5. ***Punishment interferes with the bond between parent and child, as it is not human nature to feel loving towards someone who hurts us.***
 - The true spirit of cooperation, which every parent desires, can arise only through a strong bond based on mutual feelings of love and respect. Punishment, even when it appears to work, can produce only superficially good behavior based on fear. In contrast, cooperation based on respect will last permanently, bringing many years of mutual happiness as the child and parent grows older.
 6. ***Many parents never learned in their own childhood that there are positive ways of relating to children.***
 - When punishment does not accomplish the desired goals, and if the parent is unaware of alternative methods, punishment can escalate to more frequent and dangerous actions against the child.
 7. ***Anger and frustration, which cannot be safely expressed by a child, becomes stored inside and may come out at a later point in the child’s life.***
 - Anger that has been accumulating for many years can come as a shock to parents whose child now feels strong enough to express this rage. Punishment may appear to produce “good behavior” in the early years, but always at a higher price, paid by parents and by society as a whole, as the child enters adolescence and early adulthood.

8. ***Spanking on the buttocks, an erogenous zone in children, can create in the child's mind an association between pain and sexual pleasure thus leading to difficulties in adulthood.***
 - If a child receives little parental attention except when being punished, this will further merge the concepts of pain and pleasure in the child's mind. A child in this situation will have little self-esteem, believing he deserves nothing better.
9. ***In many cases of so called "bad behavior," the child is simply responding in the only way he/she can give their age and experience.***
 - Children want their parents undivided attention. In these busy times, few children receive sufficient time and attention from their parents, who are often distracted by their own problems and worries to treat their children with patience and respect. It is surely wrong and unfair to punish a child for responding in a natural way to having important needs neglected.
10. ***Punishment distracts the child from learning how to resolve conflicts in effective and humane ways.***
 - A punished child becomes preoccupied with feelings of anger and fantasies of revenge, and is thus deprived of the opportunity to learn more effective methods of solving the problem at hand. A punished child learns little about how to handle or prevent similar situation in the future. Gentle instruction, supported by a strong foundation of love and respect, is the only truly effective way to bring about commendable behavior based on strong inner values, instead of superficially "good" behavior based only on fear.

Twenty Alternatives to Spanking

1. ***Look for underlying needs:***
 - (example) Give your child something to play with while waiting in line
2. ***Give information and reasons:***
 - (example) If your child colors on the wall, explain why we color on paper only
3. ***Look for underlying feelings:***
 - Acknowledge, accept and listen to feelings
4. ***Change the environment:***
 - This is sometimes easier than trying to change the child
5. ***Find acceptable alternatives:***
 - Redirect your child's behavior
6. ***Demonstrate how you want your child to behave:***
 - (example) If your child pulls a cat's tail, show her how to pet a cat.
 - Do not rely on words alone

7. Give choices rather than commands:

- Decision-making empowers children; commands invite a power struggle.
- (example) Would you like to brush your teeth before or after putting on your PJ's.

8. Make small concessions:

- (example) I'll let you skip brushing your teeth tonight because you're tired.

9. Provide for a period of preparation:

- Tell your child how you would expect him/her to behave
- Be specific
- Role-playing can help prepare for potentially difficult situations

10. Let natural consequences occur:

- Don't rescue too much
- (example) a child who does not hang up her bathing suit and towel may find them still wet the next day

11. Communicate your own feelings:

- Let your children know how their behavior affect you

12. Use a action when necessary:

- (example) If your child insists on running across streets on your walks together, hold their hand tightly while explaining the dangers.

13. Hold your child:

- Children who are acting aggressively or obnoxiously can benefit from firm but loving holding that allows them to channel their pent up feelings into healing tears

14. Remove your child from the situation, and stay with them:

- Use the time for listening, sharing feelings, holding and conflict resolution

15. Do it together, be playful:

- Many conflict situations can be turned into games

16. Defuse the situation with laughter:

- Laughter helps resolve anger and feelings of powerlessness

17. Make a deal and negotiate:

- (example) If you're ready to leave the playground and your child is still having fun, reach an agreement on the number of times she may go down the slide before leaving.

18. Do mutual conflict-resolution:

- Discuss ongoing conflicts with your child, state your needs, and ask for their help in finding solutions

- Determine rules together
- Hold family meetings

19. *Revise your expectations:*

- Young children have intense feelings and needs and are naturally loud, curious, messy, willful, impatient, demanding, creative, forgetful, fearful, self-centered and full of energy.
- Try to accept them as they are

20. *Take a parental time-out:*

- Leave the room and do whatever is needed to regain your sense of composure and good judgment

- There are several ways that we can make children behave. One is by using force, another is using fear and a third is punishment. Unfortunately, these three methods imply that the caregiver is superior and should overpower the child. Rather than leading to a child with inner control, they make the child angry, resentful, fearful, and dependent on force.
- There is another way to discipline children. Though it may not appear to get the immediate results we might like, it is safer, more natural and humanistic. It is based on the assumption that children are by nature good, fair and honest and ultimately capable of responding to that, which is good, fair, and honest within us. This method is to treat the child with respect. It is treating the child as if he/she is as important a human being as you are. It is treating him/her with the same respect with which you wish for him to treat others, you and him or herself.
- Some researchers claim that every act of violence by an adult towards a child, no matter how brief or how mild, leaves a permanent emotional scar. The effect of these scars is cumulative. To some extent we can demonstrate this from personal experience. Most of us admit that the most indelible and most unpleasant childhood memories are those of being hurt by our parents.
- A 1995 Canadian research study funded by the Federal Government found that corporal punishment of children is associated with the following:
 - Increased level of aggression by the child
 - Increased frequency of child delinquency
 - Increased frequency of violence and crime in later life
 - Increased chance of child abuse
 - ✓ Institute for the Prevention of Child Abuse found that 85% of all cases of physical abuse resulted from some sort of over-discipline through the use of corporal punishment (spanking)

Child Care:

A majority of children spend more time in child care settings today than ever before. More children are living with two (2) income parents who work full-time and must find ways to manage their time and relationship with their spouse and children.

- For working parents, one of the biggest decisions you'll make is what child care option is best for your child
- Choosing a good quality child care center or provider and having confidence in your choice will give you peace of mind that money can't buy
- Most child and adolescent mental health professionals recognize that the ideal environment for raising a child is in the home with parents and family
- Since this type of environment is often not available, the role of day care, especially in the first few years of life, needs to be considered

Important things to Look For in the Day Care Environment:

1. *Trained, experienced teachers who enjoy, understand and can lead children*
2. *The same day care staff for a long period of time*
3. *Opportunity for creative work, imaginative play and physical activities*
4. *Space to move indoors and out*
5. *Enough teachers and assistants – ideally, at least 1 for every 5 (or fewer) children*
6. *Lots of drawing and coloring materials and toys, as well as equipment such as swings, wagons, jungle gyms, etc.*
7. *Small rather than large groups if possible*

Five Reasons to Feel Great About Child Care:

1. *Children learn sharing, cooperation and problem solving at child care centers:*
 - Research shows that children who receive good, quality child care tend to be ahead of other children intellectually and developmentally
2. *Working mothers spend the same amount of time in direct interaction with their children as full-time mothers:*
 - Employed mothers spend as much time reading to playing with their children as those at home, although they do not spend as much time simply in the same room or house with the children
 - Studies have shown that working women do not sacrifice time with their children, they sacrifice their own sleep and leisure time
3. *Children benefit from trusting relationships with more than one caregiver:*
 - Research has shown that babies with more than one attachment are less distressed when mothers leave for work, they are more playful and content in the presence of other adults, and are less distracted at the birth of a sibling

4. *A parent-child relationship is not necessarily stronger if mom stays home:*
 - Research shows that children in child care show the same degree of attachment to their mothers and the same amount of security as children who stay home
 5. *If working makes you happier, you're children will be happier:*
 - Working mothers who like their jobs have better personal adjustments, are happier, and are less depressed than full-time mothers, even those who prefer being home
 - Depressed mothers have depressing effects on their children
- The majority of children in this country are now growing up in families in which both parents or the only parent works outside of the home
 - It has become commonplace in our society for children to take care of themselves for periods of time each day – just how common this phenomenon is is a matter of dispute
 - Current census data suggests that only 7.8% of children between the ages of 5 and 13 – about 2 million – spend time in self-care, many experts estimate that over a quarter of the children who are between 6 and 14 years old spend time caring for themselves, most of them regularly

Research Findings:

- ✓ Galambos and Garbarino (1990) found no differences in academic achievement or school adjustment between small town 5th and 7th graders in self-care and their adult supervised peers
- ✓ Rodman, Pratto and Nelson (1991) found no differences in self-esteem, social skills, or sense of control over their own lives between 4th grade children in self-care and 4th graders supervised by parents
- ✓ Hedlin (1986) studied 1200 children in kindergarten through 8th grade and found that 80% of the children in self-care said they loved it or usually liked it
- ✓ Steinberg (1990) study of 5th, 6th, 8th, and 9th graders showed that the more removed from adult supervision adolescents are, the more they are susceptible to peer pressure to commit antisocial acts
- ✓ Long (1998) found that as children spend more time unattached in their homes, the incidence of experimentation with alcohol and sex increases

Parental Guidelines:

1. *How old should a child be?*
 - Although it is generally agreed that a young child in primary school should not be left alone, age is not the only consideration
 - Some children might function well at home alone, while others might not be ready to assume the responsibility of self-care
 - Parents must make an informed decision based on their own child
 - In order to be left alone, a child should want to assume the responsibility, should not be afraid to stay alone, should be able to follow directions, and should be able to solve problems independently

- Factors such as the amount of time the child will be alone, the accessibility of a parent or another adult in case of an emergency and how safe the neighborhood is, should be also taken into consideration
2. *How can a parent know if a child is ready to be left alone?*
 - The simplest way is to ask the child if she/he wants to stay alone
 - Most children will answer truthfully
 - Signs of a child's fearfulness about being left alone include turning on all the lights, having the radio or television on full volume and suffering nightmares
 3. *How long can a child be left alone?*
 - The time should be kept at a minimum
 - For older children, 3 hours per day is probably the absolute maximum
 - Parents should come home as soon as they can and postpone errands until they can take the child with them
 4. *Can a child be left with an older brother or sister?*
 - Most child development experts agree that no child under 10 can effectively supervise other children
 - It is recommended that when an older child is left in charge, all children in the family should be instructed about self-care and be made individually responsible rather than relying on the oldest child to carry responsibility for the others
 5. *What should a parent do to make the latchkey experience work?*
 - The experience should be a positive one, reinforcing the child's sense of independence and competence, and minimizing fear and anxiety
 - Above all, it should be made clear that the parent is in charge, whether physically present or not
 - A carefully considered set of rules and back-up systems should be developed and discussed with the child so that he/she is aware of what is expected by the parent
 - The main issue for a parent in deciding if a child can function as a latchkey kid is whether he/she is capable of following agreed rules, completing homework, and accomplishing chores

Preparing Your Child:

- Assess your child's maturity level maturity means a child can do the right thing in terms of self-care and property
 - ✓ Can the child reason through the consequences of his/her actions?
- Teach your child basic safety precautions, including how to check in with parents or other adults, answer the phone and deal with emergencies
- Make a schedule and set limits
 - ✓ Setting limits should be a collaborative effort for both the parent and child

- ✓ Be realistic in setting limits and expectations
- Encourage responsibility
 - ✓ This “free” time offers a good opportunity for your child to independently handle household chores or tasks
 - ✓ Set rewards for completion of tasks
 - ✓ The rewards teach kids that good deeds and hard work can reap benefits

School/School Problems:

Parents are placing more and more responsibility on teachers and other educators to make the academic environment more stimulating and having their children learn more information. Many parent(s) are dealing with children who have special educational needs that need to be examined and dealt with so that the child receives the most benefit from their academic program.

Going to school usually is an exciting, enjoyable event for young children, but for some, it brings fear or panic. Parents have cause for concern when their child regularly feels sick from tension, plays sick or with minor physical complaints wishes to stay home from school. Not wanting to go to school is most common in children ages 5-7 and 11-14. These are times when children are dealing with the new challenges of elementary and middle school. These children may suffer from a paralyzing fear of leaving the safety of their parents and home. The child's panic and refusal to go to school is very difficult for parents to cope with, but these fears can be treated successfully, with professional help. Refusal to go to school often begins following a period at home in which the child has become closer to the parent, such as a summer vacation, a holiday break, or a brief illness. It also may follow a stressful occurrence, such as the death of a pet or relative, a change in schools, or a move to a new neighborhood. The child may complain of a headache, sore throat, or stomachache shortly before it is time to leave for school. The "illness" subsides after the child is allowed to stay home, only to reappear the next morning before school. In some cases, the child may simply refuse to leave the house. Children with an unreasonable fear of school may:

1. display clinging behavior
1. display excessive worry and fear about parents or about harm to themselves
2. shadow the mother or father around the house
3. have difficulty going to sleep
4. have nightmares
5. have exaggerated, unrealistic fears of animals, monster, burglars
6. fear being alone in the dark, or
7. have severe tantrums when forced to go to school
2. feel unsafe staying in a room by themselves

Such fears are common among children with separation anxiety disorder. The potential long-term effects (anxiety and panic disorder as an adult) are serious for a child who has persistent fears and does not receive professional assistance. The child may develop serious educational or social problems if away from school and friends for an extended period of time.

The parents and child can benefit from seeing a child and adolescent mental health professional, who will work with them in an effort to immediately return the child to school and other important daily activities. Since the panic comes from leaving home rather than being in school, frequently the child is calm once in school. Refusal to go to school in the older child or adolescent is generally a more serious illness, and often requires treatment that is more intensive. Unreasonable fears about leaving the home and parents can be successfully treated, and parents should not hesitate to seek professional help.

Of course with almost all teachers in almost all grades Homework is assigned on a regular basis. It also seems to be the biggest difficult that most parents have with their children

What is Homework?

- Assigning homework serves various educational needs
- It serves as an intellectual discipline, establishes study habits, eases time constraints on the amount of circular material that can be covered in class, and supplements and reinforces work done in school
- In addition it fosters initiative, independence, and responsibility and brings home and school closer together.
- Research in the last decade has focused on the relationship between homework and student achievement and has found that it greatly strengthens the case for homework.

Checklist for Helping Your Child with Homework:

- Many children think of homework as punishment rather than reinforcing the learning done during the school day.
- Although designed to help children develop a sense of discipline and organization, homework can trigger a power struggle between the parent(s) and child.
- Because parents' constant nagging and children's avoidance of homework can generate attitudes towards schoolwork done at home, specific tips on helping children with their homework also helps parents approach this task more positively.

1. *Set a consistent quiet time for children to do their homework.* Parents and children could decide together on a particular time. The length of time should vary with children's ages and amount of work. If a child finishes homework before the allotted time is over, pleasure reading may then be substituted. If a favorite TV show occurs during this time, it can be videotaped and viewed later. Parents can model appropriate behaviors for the child by reading during this quiet time instead of watching TV.

How this helps the child: Child is less likely to rush through homework assignments, television viewing will be controlled.

2. *Help children complete one or two examples in homework, not every problem or question.* When a child turns in homework that was done accurately, the teacher assumes the child understands the material. IF the child does not really understand the material because the homework was finished by the parent, the child may become frustrated and perform poorly on subsequent assignments.

How this helps the child: Child gets some attention from the parent, but also develops independence in completing projects on his/her own. Teachers see the mistakes a child makes on homework and appropriately charts the child's progress in understanding concepts.

3. *Help children organize a time frame for difficult homework and long-term projects.* Science projects and term papers cannot be done overnight. Help children set up specific goals for such long-term assignments. Difficult homework may require structuring more study breaks, and may need to be done early in the evening when the child is more rested. Help children break projects into smaller steps that don't seem so overwhelming.

How this helps the child: Child learns how to pace himself/herself in relation to ability and goals; learns how to organize time and complete work in stages.

4. *Reduce the stress in a child's life.* Some children have so many extra-curricular activities that they are too tired or too distracted to do homework. Soccer, piano, 4-H and swimming practices are too much for a child who also has homework to complete. One or two extra-curricular activities are usually enough for most children.

How this helps the child: Child learns to avoid burnout and overload; child has enough energy to complete homework accurately, and has some free time to relax.

5. *Recognize the limits of your patience.* If you are constantly irritated with your child because he/she tries several times before spelling a word correctly or has trouble completing a math problem, get help from a tutor or the other parent. Someone from school or the neighborhood could recommend an acceptable tutor. Neither the parent nor the child benefits from tense and negative feelings that arise from impatient parents trying too hard to help their children with homework.

How this helps the child: Child sees that parents recognize personal strengths and weaknesses; the relationship between parent and child is saved; child performs better on school assignments.

6. *Use a non-threatening approach to homework.* Children make mistakes in homework assignments. Instead of saying “That’s wrong – here’s the right answer,” as the child how she/he got the answer. When the child is asked to explain the thinking process about the answer, he/she often catches the mistakes and becomes less discouraged. Another advantage of using this technique is that parents can discover the mistaken logic behind the incorrect answer.

How this helps the child: Child becomes more secure in his/her own ability; parents are thought of as encouraging and supportive instead of threatening.

7. *Support the teacher.* When you see problems with the amount or type of homework that teachers are assigning, make an appointment with the teacher to discuss the issue. Complaining to the teacher in front of the child can encourage the child to question the teacher’s competence and authority, creating discipline problems in the classroom.

How this helps the child: Child maintains respect for the parent and the teacher’s position; parents and teachers work together to help children learn and grow in a positive direction.

How Much Time Should Your Child Spend on Homework?

- According to some recent research, 2 ways to increase students’ opportunities to learn are to increase the amount of time that students have to learn and to expand the amount of content they receive – homework assignments foster both of these goals.
- According to statements by the National PTA and the National Education Association, the following amounts of homework are recommended:
 - Kindergarten to 3rd grade – no more than 20 minutes per day
 - 4th to 6th grade – 20 to 40 minutes per day
 - 7th to 12th grade – the recommended amount of time varies according to the type and number of subjects a student is taking, generally college bound students receive lengthier and more involved homework than students preparing to enter the workforce immediately after graduation.

Some children have significant academic abilities that need to be addressed in their academic setting.

- Giftedness is that precious endowment of potentially outstanding abilities which allows a person to interact with the environment with remarkably high levels of achievement and creativity
- Gifted and talented children are identified by professionally qualified persons who by virtue of outstanding abilities are capable of high performance
- These children may require differentiated educational programs and/or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and society
- Using this broad definition of giftedness, a school system can expect to identify between 10% to 15% of its student population as gifted and talented

General Characteristics of the Gifted Child:

- These are typical factors stressed by educational authorities as being indicative of giftedness, obviously no child is outstanding in all areas
 1. Shows superior reasoning powers and marked ability to handle ideas; can generalize readily from specific facts and can see subtle relationships and has outstanding problem-solving abilities
 2. Shows persistent intellectual curiosity, asks searching questions, shows exceptional interest in many things
 3. Has a wide range of interests, often of an intellectual kind, develops one or more interests to considerable depth
 4. Is markedly superior in quality and quantity of written and/or spoken vocabulary
 5. Reads avidly and absorbs books well beyond his/her years
 6. Learns quickly and easily and retains what is learned
 7. Shows insight into arithmetical problems that require careful reasoning and grasps mathematical concepts readily
 8. Shows creative ability or imaginative expression in such things as music, art, dance, drama, shows sensitive and finesse in rhythm, movement and bodily control
 9. Sustains concentration for lengthy periods and shows outstanding responsibility and independence in classroom work
 10. Sets realistic high standards for self, is self-critical in evaluating and correcting his/her own efforts
 11. Shows initiative and originality in intellectual work
 12. Observes keenly and is responsive to new ideas
 13. Shows social poise and an ability to communicate with adults in a mature way
 14. Gets excitement and pleasure from intellectual challenges, shows an alert and subtle sense of humor

Responsive Parenting:

- Parents who spend time with their gifted child are more able to tune in to their child's interests and respond by offering appropriate educational enrichment opportunities

- It is important for parents to read to their children frequently, even when the child is capable of reading to themselves
- In the early years parents can help their children discover their personal interests, expose their children to their own interests and encourage their children to learn about a wide variety of subjects such as art, music, museums and sports
- Home stimulation and support of interests is vital to the development of talents

School Placement:

- Gifted children generally benefit by spending at least some time in the classroom with children of similar abilities
- The educational programs should be designed to foster progress at their own rate of development
- Early entrance or other forms of acceleration may be considered when the school gifted program is not sufficiently challenging or when there is no opportunity for gifted children to be grouped with age peers who are intellectually advanced
- In preschool and primary years, mixed aged groupings are beneficial as long as the gifted child is not the oldest in the group

Along with Gifted Children are some children who experience learning problems. These Learning Disabilities need to be addressed so that the child can benefit from his/her academic program.

What are Learning Disabilities?

- A disorder that affects people's ability to either interpret what they see and hear or to link information from different parts of the brain. These limitations can show up in many ways – as specific difficulties with spoken and written language, coordination, self-control, or attention. Such difficulties extend to schoolwork and can impede learning to read or write, or to do math.
- Learning disabilities can be a lifelong condition that affects many parts of a person's life: school or work, daily routines, family life and sometimes even friendships and play.
- Learning disabilities can be divided into 3 broad categories:
 1. Developmental Speech and Language Disorders
 - Developmental Articulation Disorder
 - Developmental Expressive Language Disorder
 - Developmental Receptive Language Disorder
 2. Academic Skills Disorders
 - Developmental Reading Disorder
 - Developmental Writing Disorder
 - Developmental Arithmetic Disorder

3. "Other" a catch all that includes certain coordination disorders and learning handicaps not covered by the other terms
- Mental health professionals stress that since no one knows what causes learning disabilities, it does not help parents to look backwards to search for possible reasons for it
 - Even though a learning disability does not disappear, given the right types of educational experiences, people have a remarkable ability to learn. The brain's flexibility to learn new skills is probably greatest in young children and may diminish somewhat after puberty; this is why early detection is so important.

What To Look For If You Suspect a Learning Disability:

- Parents should be aware of the most frequent signals of learning disabilities, when a child:
 1. Has difficulty understanding and following directions
 2. Has trouble remembering what someone just told him/her
 3. Fails to master reading, writing and/or math skills and thus fails schoolwork
 4. Has difficulty distinguishing right from left – for example, confusing 25 with 52, "b" with "d" or "on" with "no."
 5. Lacks coordination – in walking, sports, or small activities such as holding a pencil or tying shoelaces
 6. Easily loses or misplaces homework, schoolbooks or other important items
 7. Cannot understand the concept of time; is confused by "yesterday" "today", "tomorrow."

Some Important Facts About Learning Disabilities:

- Early diagnosis and appropriate intervention and support are vital for the individual with LD. Without early and adequate identification and intervention, learning disabilities can lead to serious consequences for the individual and for society – including loss of self-esteem, and consequently, school drop-out, juvenile delinquency, illiteracy and other critical problems.
- 15 to 20% of the US population have some form of learning disabilities according to estimates derived from the latest research conducted through the National Institute of Health
- Learning disabilities often run in families
- Learning disabilities are a lifelong condition which can be manifested in different ways during the school years and throughout the life span. Individuals with LD can compensate for their difficulties with appropriate intervention, support and accommodations
- Attention Deficit and hyperactivity sometimes co-occur with learning disabilities.
- Learning Disabilities have distinct characteristics and should not be confused with the following handicaps: mental retardation, autism, deafness, blindness and behavioral disorders.
- Learning disabilities are not the same in all people. Each individual is unique, and manifestations of learning disabilities vary tremendously.

How are Learning Disabilities Formally Diagnosed?

- A learning disability is defined as a significant gap between the person's intelligence and the skills the person has achieved at each age.
- Learning disabilities may be informally flagged by observing significant delays in the child's skills development. A 2 year delay in primary grades is considered significant.
- An accurate diagnosis is made by using standardized intelligent and achievement tests that compare the child's level of ability to what is considered normal development for a person of that age and intelligence
- Every parent has the right to have his/her child examined and tested by the school system to determine if there is a learning disability suspected by the child's school teacher or parent(s).
- After assessing the child's strengths and weaknesses through Psychological Testing, the Special Education Teacher or School Team will design an Individual Educational Program (IEP) if the child is identified as having a learning disability. The IEP outlines the specific skills the child needs to develop as well as appropriate learning activities that build on the child's strengths.

How Can Families Learn To Cope?

- The effects of learning disabilities can ripple outward from the disabled child or adult to family, friends and peers at school or work.
- Children with LD often absorb what others thoughtlessly say about them and may define themselves as "*behind,*" "*slow,*" or "*different.*"
- Sometimes they do not know they are different, but they know how awful they feel. Their tension or shame can lead them to act out in various ways from withdrawal to belligerence.
- These children often have trouble making new friends, or may feel more comfortable with children who are much younger who play at their level.
- Some children with LD seem unable to interpret tone of voice and facial expressions thus misunderstanding the situation they are in and then act inappropriately.
- The more that children or teenagers fail, the more they may act out their frustration and damage their self-esteem. The more they act out, the more trouble and punishment it brings, further lowering their self-esteem

- Having a child with LD can also be an emotional burden for the family. Parents often sweep through a range of emotions: denial, guilt, frustration, anger, and despair. Brothers and sisters may be annoyed or embarrassed by their sibling, or jealous of all the attention the child gets with LD
- Parents can help by structuring tasks and the environment for the child in ways that allow the child to succeed. Find ways to help children build on their strengths and work around their disabilities
- Every child needs to grow up feeling competent and loved. When children have learning disabilities, parents may need to work harder at developing their children's self-esteem and relationship building skills.
- Most parents and teachers are concerned about motivation
- There is a feeling that if children are “properly” motivated and “self-motivated” early that it will carry over onto later life
- Research has shown that the child who does well in school (properly motivated) usually does well at work and makes good community relationships
- There is no universal schedule for achieving these – each child has an inner timetable and different children are motivated to learn different things at different times
- A recent study emphasized 2 major factors leading to the development of achievement motivation:
 1. Children must have opportunities to associate feelings of satisfaction with simple changes they themselves have made in their environment
 2. Parents should set standards and assist children to strive for excellence; the child must know what is worthwhile and must be helped to discriminate between a good try and a poor try to know that people in his/her life approve of effective tries even if they do not succeed

Another important feature that many parents are concerned about concerns motivation. Parents are continually attempting to motivate their child(ren) to accomplish goals, etc., that they feel are necessary.

Motivating a Child:

Psychological Guidelines:

- Practical, usable concepts and “how to” hints for assisting children towards positive motivation, whatever the goal, can be drawn up as follows:
 1. Warm, accepting parents who expect the best while keeping in mind their children's unique needs
 2. Limit setting, letting children know there are boundaries to kinds of behavior (or absence of it) acceptable to adults in their lives
 3. Confident expectations of success based on a child's potential often brings success

- It is not necessarily what happens, but what the child expects to happen that often arouses anxiety
 - Expectations of success: “You’ve worked so hard, I’m sure you’ll do well on the test,” usually hits a responsive note
4. Letting children know that because they are chastised for something or fail in something one time, it does not mean they will always fail or continually be scolded, matters a great deal
 - Because children often generalize emotions from one situation to all situations, parents must let them know that the slate can be wiped clean, that criticisms is not permanent
 5. Acceptance of a child’s feelings, even negative ones, is helpful
 - Children need to be allowed to talk about their fears, annoyances, jealousies and angers, as well as about their triumphs and joys

Parental Guidelines:

1. Parents must let children know that they have noticed effort or lack of it and that they care
 - Blanket, nondiscrimination approval of the child gives the message that as a parent you are not really paying attention
 2. Parental approval and disapproval must be consistent
 - If your child is doing something for which he/she has formerly been praised, the absences of comment can be taken as disapproval
 - If your child does something for which he/she has been previously been punished, the absences of comment might be construed as permission to continue with this behaviors
 3. Concrete rewards are not taboo
 - As adults we all work for money, status, promotions, etc., which are examples of concrete rewards, children too often need such rewards in their lives
 - Often children are expected to work and perform solely for work’s sake
 - Rewards are more effective when they are coupled with intangible rewards such as praise and love
 - Setting goals and celebrating their achievement helps motivate children to reach for the next goal
- Obviously, no parent can do everything right all the time
 - Parents do not need or should they expect to be perfect
 - Real concern for your child, watchful interest in them, and open communication with them, are the crux of the answers to motivation
 - Children are flexible and resilient and will grow in spite of imperfect human and material environments, but as parents you can assist them in their emotional, intellectual and psychological growth

It is so very important for all parents to continually be involved with their child(ren) educational placement. The most important dialogue should be with the teacher(s) that are involved with your son/daughter.

- Conference time is just around the corner for some parents, and it may already be here for others
- These types of conferences are traditionally the most formal means of communication between parents and teachers, and they should be seen as providing a rich opportunity to build communication and understanding between the home and school
- These conferences could also be very stressful and anxiety producing for many parents
- The working parent may have to rush to a conference early in the morning before work, take time off at lunch, or wait until the end of a long day to meet with the teachers
- Other parents may be anxious about meeting with their child's teacher because of their own school-related experiences as a child
- This stress and anxiety can lead to strained or shortened conversations between the teacher and parent which will not benefit them or the child
- To reduce this tension and stress, it is important for parents to come to a conference well-prepared so that the time can be spent efficiently

Possible Questions to Ask Include:

For preschool-aged children:

1. How is my child progressing developmentally?
2. Does my child do really well in some areas that I can reinforce at home?
3. Does my child need special help with anything?
4. Does my child make friends easily?
5. Does my child participate in group activities?
6. What is my child like during the day?
7. What can I do to continue the learning process at home?

For older children:

1. What is my child studying this year?
2. What aspects of school does my child appear to enjoy the most?
3. What are my child's best/worst subjects?
4. How well does my child get along with classmates?
5. Has my child completed assignments regularly?
6. Does my child willingly participate in class activities?
7. Does my child follow directions?
8. Have you noticed any changes in my child's behavior(s) during the year?
9. What tests has my child had or will my child have this year?
10. What do the test scores tell me about my child's progress?
11. How does my child handle taking tests?
12. Does my child need help in any academic area or need to be referred to school specialists?

13. How much learning do you require be done independently?
14. What expectations do you have for children in your classroom?

- It is important that children feel that their teacher and parent(s) are working together on their behalf
- A good partnership between the home and school will help make sure that children get the best education possible
- If there is a problem that is identified, ask for specific examples of the behavior or the classroom work so that you and the teacher can work together towards resolution
- What YOU have to say is just as important as what the teacher has to say
- You are the expert on your child's personality – what makes them anxious, motivates them, makes them feel proud
- You have information about your child's strengths, talents, hobbies and interests that can help the teacher – information the teacher needs
- SHARE IT

Sexuality Issues:

Dealing with teens concerning sexual issues and relationships has become even more important during this time. Adolescents and children are becoming involved and aware of sexuality issues earlier in life and experimenting with sexuality at earlier ages.

- A healthy part of every child's development is their involvement with their peers
- This is especially true during adolescence as teenagers develop a sense of independence from their parents
- Members of peer groups often dress alike, talk about the same things, like the same music, laugh at the same jokes, and share the same secrets
- These peers provide the young adult with a sounding board to test their ideas and a standard by which to judge their own physical and psychological growth
- This desire to be accepted by peers is perhaps the strongest motivating force during adolescence and it is for this reason parents should always know who their teenagers are "hanging out" with
- The peer group, no matter how inappropriate it seems to adults, really does give something significant to the adolescent
- It becomes the place where the teenager feels accepted, where they can feel good about themselves and enhance their self-image
- During adolescence kids gravitate towards other kids with the same problems and in the same situation as themselves – there is a very strong need to satisfy that thirst for unity and for acceptance which results in peers having more influence on behaviors than parents
- There are 2 main goals of adolescence that peer relationships help foster
 1. *Who am I?*
 2. *Autonomy*

- Discovering that they are separate and independent from their parents and who they are and how they fit in makes it very clear why peers occupy a lot of the time and energy of adolescence

What can parents do to foster good peer relationships?

1. *Create Strong Bonds with Your Child:*
 - This should start well before adolescence
 - The strength of a child's relationship with their family will directly impact on whether peer pressure will be a productive or destructive influence
 - Instill a strong sense of conscious with ethical and moral values that will last a lifetime
 2. *Build Up Their Self-Esteem:*
 - This should also start at a very young age
 - Teenagers with a good self-image will almost always seek out membership in more socially acceptable groups
 - Teenagers who grow up with little to no self-confidence stand a greater chance of getting mixed up with antisocial peer groups
 3. *Assist in the Development of Decision Making Abilities:*
 - Children who can make judgments for themselves are less likely to let other decide for them
 - Teach your teenagers to be assertive, to stand up for their beliefs, even if their ideas may be different from yours
 - This will assist in helping them learn how to make wise and independent decisions as adults
 4. *Take an Interest in your Teenager's Activities and Friendships:*
 - This helps reduce the distance between generations and lets your teenager know that you are interested in what they are doing and who they are doing it with
 - This will also help in opening the lines of communication
 - Positive discussions with your adolescent provide very strong influences on them and sends them the message that you care enough about them to listen to their ideas and feelings
 - Avoid talking down to your teenager, they want to be treated as a grown-up, so talk with them as you would another adult
 5. *Set a Good Example:*
 - Adolescents sometimes lean more from what they see than what they hear
 - Remember they will follow your lead so if you are doing something that is wrong what is the message that you may be giving to your teenager
 - Practice what you are preaching
- It is a different world today with kids growing up faster and TV, movies, magazines and music videos bombarding our children with thousands of sexual messages a day

- More than 1,000,000 US teenagers will end up pregnant this year alone
- According to the Centers for Disease Control, 54% of all American high school students have had sexual intercourse at least once before their 18th birthday.
- Among high school seniors, the figure is 73%
- If you think 14 or 15 is a good age to begin talking about this subject, think again, the dramatic rise in teen pregnancy has revealed that girls are having intercourse at 14 with boys starting at 12
- It's easy to become a parent; it's a lot harder to be a good one. If you really want to make a difference in your child's sexual education, engage in their lives and talk with them frequently
- It is important to realize that your children's sexuality encompasses far more than the physical acts of sex – it also includes how their bodies develop and respond sexually and how they feel about these responses. It also includes what they think is right or wrong related to sexuality.
- Talking with your teen about sexuality does not always need to consist of lectures or situations where you sit your child down to “talk about sex.”
- There are many teachable moments that you can take advantage of to initiate a relaxed discussion. The average TV viewer sees 14,000 references to sex in the course of one (1) year. Use these as a springboard for good healthy discussions.

THE DIFFICULT ISSUES:

- If you are like most parents, you will have to confront some difficult issues as you discuss sexuality with your teen. Here are a few important issues and suggestions as to how they can be discussed
 1. **Masturbation:**
 - Many parents are particularly embarrassed and uncomfortable about this subject
 - It may have been a taboo subject when you were growing up and, because of religious or moral beliefs, you may think it is wrong
 - We need to realize that many teen practice this in fact, one study of 15 and 16 year olds found that _ of the boys and more than _ of the girls have used masturbation regularly
 - We must realize that the beliefs about the acceptability of masturbation are changing with the medical, psychological and many religious groups now recognizing it as a normal process that causes no harm
 - This only becomes a problem when it is practiced in inappropriate places or accompanied by strong feelings of guilt or fear
 - Try and let your teenager know that it is normal and natural to be interested in exploring their own bodies, then go on to explain your own values and beliefs
 - Try not to use shame or guilt as this may produce fear and confusion and not change behaviors
 2. **Resisting Sexual Pressure:**
 - This is a very difficult issue in that it takes more than just stating to your teen to “just say no” to sex.

- Your teen will need to learn how to say “No.”
- Your teenager needs to develop and practice the skills for resisting unwanted sexual pressures
- Talk with them about specific ways to counter the pressure from peers and about ways to show love besides having sex
- Role playing situations may be of some help even though they may feel uncomfortable and it’s okay if laughing starts since laughter is a great tension release
- The goal is to have your teenager prepare some ways to politely, but firmly, decline sexual propositions

3. **Contraception and “Safer” Sex:**

- Most of parents want to postpone their teen’s involvement with sex and feel that if they provide information about contraception or safe sex that this will send the message that sex is “okay.”
- Studies have found that teens who are informed about sex tend to delay sexual involvement longer than those who are not informed
- While we may want our teens to follow are values that we have taught them, they also may choose a different direction and they may try sexual intercourse
- It would be foolish to compound the problem by them getting pregnant or catching a sexual transmitted disease (STD).
- A sexually active teen needs to know the risks and benefits of different contraceptive techniques and how to reduce the risk of AIDS and other STD’s

Healthy self-esteem is a child's armor against the challenges of the world. Kids who feel good about themselves seem to have an easier time handling conflicts and resisting negative pressures. They tend to smile more readily and enjoy life. These kids are realistic and generally optimistic. In contrast, for children who have low self-esteem, challenges can become sources of major anxiety and frustration. Children who think poorly of themselves have a hard time finding solutions to problems. If they are plagued by self-critical thoughts, such as "I'm no good" or "I can't do anything right," they may become passive, withdrawn, or depressed. Read further to discover the important role you can play in promoting healthy self-esteem in your child.

What Is Self-esteem?

In order to equip your child with the tools that will help her develop healthy self-esteem, it is essential to better understand what self-esteem is. Many professionals describe self-esteem as a “...collection of beliefs or feelings that we have about ourselves. How we define ourselves hugely influences our motivations, attitudes, and behaviors.” This pattern tends to start very early in life at about the age of 3 or 4. Children are exploring many ideas and reaching conclusions about themselves that begin to crystallize during

this time period. But the process starts even before then, during infancy. When a baby or toddler reaches a milestone, she experiences a sense of accomplishment that bolsters her developing self-esteem. Learning to roll over after dozens of unsuccessful attempts or finally mastering getting the spoon into her mouth every time she eats are experiences that teach a young child a "can do" attitude. The concept of success following persistence starts early. As a child tries, fails, tries again, fails again and again, and then finally succeeds, she is developing ideas about her own capabilities. At the same time, she is creating thoughts about herself based on her interactions with other people. This is why parental involvement is key to helping a child form accurate, healthy self-perceptions. Self-esteem can also be defined as the combination of feelings of capability with feelings of being loved. A child who is happy with her achievements, but does not feel loved, may eventually experience low self-esteem. Likewise, a child who feels loved but is hesitant about her own abilities can also end up feeling poorly about herself. Healthy self-esteem results when the right balance is attained.

Signs of Unhealthy and Healthy Self-esteem

Self-esteem fluctuates as a child grows. It is frequently changed and fine-tuned, as it is affected by a child's experiences and new perceptions. It helps for parents to be aware of the signs of both healthy and unhealthy self-esteem. A child who has low self-esteem may not want to try new things. She frequently speaks negatively about herself, saying such things as, "I'm stupid," "I'll never learn how to do this," or "What's the point? Nobody cares about me anyway." She exhibits a low tolerance for frustration, giving up easily or waiting for somebody else to take over. Children with low self-esteem see temporary setbacks as permanent, intolerable conditions. A sense of pessimism predominates. A child who has healthy self-esteem tends to enjoy interacting with others. She's comfortable in social settings and enjoys group activities as well as independent pursuits. She's willing to pursue new interests. When challenges arise, she is able to work toward finding solutions. She voices discontent without belittling herself or others. For example, rather than saying, "I'm an idiot," she says, "I don't understand this." She knows her strengths and weaknesses, and accepts them. A sense of optimism prevails.

What Parents Can Do to Help

How can a parent help to foster healthy self-esteem in a child? Here are some tips that can make a big difference:

1. Watch what you say:

Children are very sensitive to parents' words. Remember to praise your child not only for a job well done, but also for effort.

2. But be truthful:

For example, if your child doesn't make the soccer team, avoid saying something like, "Well, next time you'll work harder and make it." Instead, say something like, "Well, you didn't make the team, but I'm really proud of the effort you put into it." Reward effort and completion instead of outcome.

3. Be a positive role model:

If you are excessively harsh on yourself, pessimistic, or unrealistic about your abilities and limitations, your child may eventually mirror you. Nurture your own self-esteem, and your child will have a great role model.

4. Identify and redirect your child's inaccurate beliefs:

The pervasive step for parents to take is to identify kids' irrational beliefs about themselves. Whether they are about perfection, attractiveness, ability, or anything else, these inaccurate perceptions can take root and become reality to a child. For example, a child who does very well in school but struggles with math may say, "I can't do math. I'm a bad student." Not only is this a false generalization, it's also a belief that will set her up for failure.

5. Encourage your child to see the situation in its true light:

A helpful response might be: "You are a good student. You do great in school. Math is just a subject that you need to spend more time on."

6. Be spontaneous and affectionate with your child:

Your love will go a long way to boost your child's self-esteem. Give her hugs. Tell her you're proud of her. Leave a note in her lunch box that reads, "I think you're terrific!" Give praise frequently and honestly, without overdoing it. Kids can tell whether something comes from the heart. Give positive, accurate feedback. A comment such as, "You always work yourself up into such a frenzy!" will cause a child to start believing she has no control over her outbursts. A better statement is, "Boy, you were really mad at your brother. But I appreciate that you didn't yell at him or hit him." This acknowledges her feelings and rewards the choice she made, encouraging her to make the right choice again next time.

7. Create a safe, nurturing home environment:

A child who does not feel safe or is being abused in her own home will suffer immensely from low self-esteem. A child who is exposed to parents who fight and argue repeatedly may become depressed and withdrawn. Always remember to protect and respect your child. Make your home a safe haven for your family. Watch for signs of abuse by others, problems in school, trouble with peers, and other potential factors that may affect your child's self-esteem. Deal with these issues sensitively but swiftly. Help your child become involved in constructive experiences. Activities that encourage cooperation rather than competition are especially helpful in fostering self-esteem. For example, mentoring programs in which an older child helps a younger one learn to read can do wonders for both children.

Finding Professional Help

If you suspect that your child has low self-esteem, you can get professional help. Family and child counselors can work to uncover underlying issues that are preventing your child from feeling good about herself. Therapy can adjust the way a child views herself and the world around her, enabling her to first see herself in a more realistic light and then to accept who she truly is. With a little help, every child can develop healthy self-esteem for a happier, more fulfilling life.

- As parents you are already teaching your children many things about sexuality and your children are looking to you for specific information and reassurances
- Children begin to learn about sexuality when they are born from the way they are touched by others, the way their bodies feel to them, what is okay and not okay to do, the words different members use to refer to parts of their bodies, who hugs in what ways, who does the chores and so on
- They are also picking up a great deal outside the family whenever they watch TV, listen to music, talk with friends or just live in this world
- A study by the National Institute of Health in 1997 found some alarming statistics about this issue
 - ✓ 94% of parents of 8-12 year olds have discussed substance abuse, and 84% have discussed violence
 - ✓ only 31% of these teenage children in the study indicated that their parents discussed sex and how to handle pressure to have sex with them
 - ✓ 58% of adolescents in this survey wished that their parents discussed sex more openly with them
 - ✓ 64% of the 10 to 12 year olds stated that them and their peers consider their parents to be an important resource on issues such as sex, AIDS, violence and drugs
- Communication is the key in educating our children
- Questions about sex could begin at an early age, therefore, open lines of communication must be established

Talking with Your Children About Sexuality:

Infants and Toddlers (0-2 years):

- These aged children do not need to know the facts about sexuality, but they are beginning to learn about their sexuality and you are their main teachers
- Naming all their body parts teaches them that their entire body is natural and healthy
- Reacting calmly when they touch their genitals teaches them that sexual feelings are normal and healthy
- Holding, hugging and talking with them and responding to their needs all lay the groundwork for trust and open discussions as they grow older

Preschoolers (3-4 years):

- Children at this age are learning about their bodies and they are learn through their play
- They begin to ask questions about where babies come from and they can understand simple answers
- They can also begin to accept and need privacy
- The best thing a parent can do at this age is create a home where children will feel free to ask questions about their bodies, health and sexuality

Young Children (5-8 years):

- Children at this age are able to understand more complex issues about health, disease and sexuality
- Children at this age are also more exposed to issues related to sexuality from TV and things that they have heard
- They tend to understand basic answers to their questions based on concrete examples from their own lives

Preteens (9-12 years):

- Children at these ages are going through all the changes of puberty and are concerned about their bodies, their looks and what is “normal”
- For some young teens this also marks the time they begin dating and early sexual experiences
- Because of the strong social pressures which begins at this age it is important that you talk about sexuality
- Good parents discuss prevention NOW
- During the changes associated with puberty, preteens are very curious about sex and need to be given the basic and accurate information about this
- They should also be informed that sex can have consequences for them
- This is the time to let your children know that they can come to you with any questions they may have about their sexuality

Teenagers (13-19 years):

- Parents should share their family values about sexual behaviors
- Many parents want to tell their children to wait to have intercourse until they are no longer teenagers, yet research has found out that the majority of Americans have had intercourse by their 20th birthday

Communication Tips for Parents:

Parents are the primary sexuality educators of their children:

- Children want to talk about sexuality with their parents and to hear their values
- It is not just a parent’s right, it is their responsibility to talk about this issue

Be an “askable” parent and reward questions:

- It is never a good idea to tell your children to wait until they are older before you will answer their questions
- When children ask questions you have a chance to help them learn
- Reward the question being asked

Find “teachable” moments:

- Difficult situations are often teachable moments

You don’t need to wait until they ask a question:

- Many children never ask questions
- When our children are young we don’t wait to teach them they should look both ways before crossing the street, touching a hot stove, etc.
- You need to decide what is important for children to know and then tell them before a crisis arrives

It is okay to feel uncomfortable:

- Very few adults have had a formal course in sexuality and it is hard for many adults to talk about sexual matters
- You can let your children know you are uncomfortable, but you will talk to them because you love them and want to help

Talk about the joys of sexuality:

- Tell them that sexuality is natural and healthy, that loving relationships are the best part of life and that intimacy is a wonderful part of adult life

Listen, Listen, Listen:

- When your children ask questions, thank them for asking and ask them why they want to know or what they already know

Facts are not enough:

- In addition to sharing facts and thoughts, do share your feelings, values and beliefs

Be aware of the “question behind the question”:

- The unspoken question “Am I normal?” is often hiding behind many questions about sexual development, sexual thoughts and sexual feelings
- Reassure your children as often as possible