

(Continued from last month....)

# Raising Children of Character: 10 Principles

Tom Lickona, Director, Center for the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Rs

*Raising a civilized child takes 20 years of constant teaching and another 10 of review..*

~Judith Martin (*Miss Manners*)

### 3. *Love Children*

When kids feel loved, they become attached to us. That attachment makes them receptive to our guidance.

***One-on-one-time.*** We need emotionally intimate time to keep any relationship strong and growing. To protect one-on-one-time with our children, we should plan it. I know a school superintendent, a father of four, who can show you in his appointment book which child he'll be spending the coming Saturday afternoon with. "If I didn't schedule that time," he says, "it wouldn't happen."

***Love as communication.*** Good communication doesn't happen automatically. We often need to do something deliberate to bring about a meaningful exchange of thoughts and experiences. When our older son Mark was 13, I became frustrated with the fact that our exchanges typically consisted of my asking questions and his giving monosyllabic answers. ("How was school?" "Fine" "How'd the game go?" "Great.") One day, in exasperation, I said: "It would be great if you asked me a question."

He said, "Okay, Dad, how are your courses going this semester?" It was the first time I ever talked to him about my teaching. After that, even if we had only five minutes in the car, we'd do "back-and-forth questions": I'd ask him one (e.g. "What was the best part and the worst part of your day?"), he'd ask me one (often the same question), and so on. It became a family tradition.

***Love as sacrifice.*** About a million children see their parents divorce each year. Marriages fail for many reasons, including violence, alcoholism, and infidelity. Researcher Judith Wallerstein's book, *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce* (2000), documents the often lasting repercussions of family breakdown for both kids and adults. Given such evidence, both secular and religious marriage counselors are now urging married couples having problems to do everything possible to try to save their marriage.

#### ***4. Teach by Example***

Teaching by example goes beyond treating our children with love and respect. It has to do with how we treat each other as spouses and how we treat and talk about others outside the family - relatives, friends, neighbors, and teachers.

These days, the most important example we set may be the stands we take - especially stands that are unpopular with our children or at odds with what other parents are permitting. What do we prohibit? Violent video games? TV shows and movies that contain sex, violence, or foul language? All forms of pornography? Immodest dress? Parties where there's drinking? Do our kids know where we stand on the great moral issues of the day - respect for life, war and peace, threats to the environment, the plight of the poor? Stands like these define our values.

#### ***5. Mangle the Moral Environment***

How should we regulate kids' use of media - TV, movies, music, video games, and the Internet? The basic rule: The use of media in the home is a privilege, not a right. Exercise of that privilege requires parental permission *and* presence. We should also thoughtfully explain our moral objections to something rather than simply forbidding it.

Today's moral environment also requires more vigilant supervision of our children. The research report *Building a Better Teenager* ([www.childtrends.org](http://www.childtrends.org).) finds that "hands-on" parents - those who know about their children's activities, friends, and behaviors and monitor them in age-appropriate ways - have teens with lower rates of sexual activity and drug and alcohol use.

We should also expose our children to what is noble and heroic. Somewhere in the evening paper there's at least one example of integrity, courage, or compassion. The website [www.teachwithmovies.com](http://www.teachwithmovies.com) is a source of films that offer positive role models and matter for moral discussion. *Books That Build Character* by William Kilpatrick provides an excellent annotated bibliography of more than 300 books appropriate for different age levels.