

Loving Your Children

Getting the Message Across

"The supreme happiness in life is the conviction that we are loved."

- Victor Hugo

Of course you care about your children. As do most parents, you probably make many sacrifices to feed, clothe, and educate your children. You might brag about them to anyone who will listen. Perhaps you even carry their pictures around to show off to friends.

Children need to know they are loved. Parents need to show their children they love them just the way they are, just because they are. Loving your children, then, is largely a matter of getting the message across.

Hidden Messages

With children, it is often the little things that count the most.

Simple, everyday events tell young children whether or not you value them. Your presence, a smile, a gentle touch, and a kind word spell "I love you" to a child.

In the same way, day-to-day happenings can tell children they are not valued very highly. Unintentionally, your words and actions can convey to children that you do not care. Think about how some of the things you say and do might look from a child's point of view:

Do you. . .

. . .tend to feed, clothe, and bathe your baby hurriedly, never taking advantage of this time to touch, talk, and play?

. . .only show your affection for your children when they do something that pleases you?

If you are always in a hurry, your child might be learning not that you are busy, but that he or she is not important. If you only express your love under certain conditions, your child may be learning that you love him IF he obeys or IF he does not wet the bed or IF he does not make any mistakes. And if children receive many such messages, they might begin to think you are not glad to have them.

Successful Signals

Children who feel unloved act differently from those who feel loved. They spend lots of time trying to reassure themselves and other people of their worth. They are very cautious about trying new things, for failure hurts them deeply.

Children who know they are loved, on the other hand, do not have to waste time proving their worth. They are not afraid to try out their wings. They know even if they fail, they can still count on your love and respect.

Be sure your children feel secure about your love for them:

- Look at what your words and actions could be telling your children about themselves.
- Find ways to show your children that no matter what, you love them.

This does not mean if you ever get angry or frustrated with your children, they are ruined forever. If the overall climate you create is one of love and respect, your children will learn they are valued —
just the way they are,
just because they are,
no ifs, ands, or buts.

Love Letters

Few things will be more important in deciding your child's future than his or her sense of self-worth. How children feel about themselves will affect whom they choose as friends, how they get along with others, and how well they make use of their abilities — in other words, all aspects of their lives. The strategies described can strengthen your children's feelings of self-worth by letting them know you love and value them.

- **Pay Attention to Your Children**
Take time to talk to them, listen to them, and show interest in their activities and interests. Try to find times when you are not hurried or tense and can focus just on them.
- **Express Your Affection Often through Physical Contact**
With babies, this means holding and cuddling. As children get older, you can offer hugs, kisses, caresses, an arm over the shoulder, or a pat on the back. Sometimes the right words are hard to find, but a gentle hug says it all.

- **Treat Your Children with the Same Respect You Show Adults**

Too often parents reserve one set of manners for adults and another for children. Parents may embarrass their children by scolding or criticizing them in front of others. Or they might get so involved in a conversation they forget their presence. Children are no less sensitive than adults and deserve the same kind of respect.

- **Tell Your Children They Are Appreciated**

Do not wait until they get good grades. Do not limit your praises to their good looks or manners. Let them know you enjoy them and think they are great all the time.

- **Respond to Your Children with Patience and Understanding**

When your child spills his milk for the third time in a row, or hits his sister over the head with a toy shovel, it is easy to treat him as a criminal. Try, though, to see the child as someone who needs your help in controlling his body and emotions.

- **Respect Children's Feelings and Abilities**

Because of their sizes, we sometimes forget that children are people, too. They have a right to privacy and to feelings of their own. Parents might have to remind themselves not to carry children when they can get there on their own, or to speak for them when they can do this for themselves.