

Teaching Values to Children

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Family is more than a place where we eat and sleep; it is the place where we learn what matters most. If all we do in families is manage groceries and sleeping space, we have missed the great opportunities to teach the great lessons about being human.

The most important way to teach values is by example. Do we teach kindness by the way we treat each other in the family? Do we teach service by the way we reach out to people around us? Do we teach resourcefulness by the way we solve problems? Children learn by example.

We teach values by the stories we tell. The simple conversations of life tell what we value. When we tell our children how much we appreciate Mrs. Jones helpfulness, we are telling them what is important to us.

In addition, many families have a regular program of reading and talking about their heroes. The heroes may be great citizens of the world, literary characters, or scriptural figures. Talking about our heroes and their deeds sends our children powerful messages about the values that we honor.

Family Traditions

We teach values by the discussion topics we emphasize. In some families it is a tradition to invite family members at a leisurely weekend dinner to talk about their best experience of the day or the past week. Family members have a chance to review their own best experiences and to learn about what is important to other family members. This can not only help us learn about each other's values but also deepen the bonds that unite us as a family.

We teach values by the traditions we institute as a family. The family that makes a tradition of helping neighbors teaches caring. The family in which family members help each other in times of need is teaching cooperation. The family that goes to the library and talks about ideas is showing its value for learning.

Some families establish a regular family fun time. Some families set aside a regular time for reading or sharing. Some families carefully choose their media (TV, videos, games) to fit with their values.

We teach values by the way we deal with family problems. When a family member is having trouble, do we unite to support and invite that person? When a person breaks important family rules, do we try to help that person find better ways?

Positive family values don't just happen. Family members learn to be strong and caring people partly because the family has carefully cultivated practices that support those values.

Applications

Talk with your family about some of the values that are most important to the family and to different family members. Rather than try to decide which values are the "right" values, notice how each person chooses differently. Enjoy the differences. Maybe each family member would pick the 3 or 4 values that mean the most to him or her.

The following list might help family members think about different values:

Control in your life
Being respected
Close relationships
Self-respect
Owning things
Mature love
Spiritual well-being
Privacy
Control of self
Security and safety
Feeling of belonging
Self-improvement
Wealth
Fun
Taking risks
Being all you can be
Deciding your own future
Wisdom
Sexual intimacy
Chastity
Protecting human life
Good health
Understanding yourself
Success and achievement
Excitement
Variety
Freedom to choose
Meaning and purpose in life
Concern for others
Power over people
Inner harmony
Enforcing law
Close family relationships
Knowledge

Invite family members to suggest how they can work together to support those values.

Discuss the idea that emphasizing any one value while neglecting other values can be a problem. For example, the person who values good health as the only value may not be willing to have fun.

What are some things that happen in your family that are contrary to your values? How can you support each other in living by your values?

See FamilyIQ's Courses in the Family category, 'Unifying Your Family: Coat of Arms,' to learn more.

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*This article is reprinted from the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service, 'Family Life.'
(www.arfamilies.org)*

