Tips for Being a Nurturing Parent

A healthy, nurturing relationship with your child is built through countless interactions over the course of time. It requires a lot of energy and work, but the rewards are well worth it. When it comes to parenting, there are few absolutes (one, of course, being that every child needs to be loved) and there is no one "right way." Different parenting techniques work for different children under different circumstances. These tips provide suggestions as you discover what works best in your family. Do not expect to be perfect; parenting is a difficult job.

Help Your Children Feel Loved and Secure

We can all take steps to strengthen our relationships with our children, including:

- Make sure your children know you love them, even when they do something wrong.
- Encourage your children. Praise their achievements and talents. Recognize the skills they are developing.
- Spend time with your children. Do things together that you both enjoy. Listen to your children.
- Learn how to use nonphysical options for discipline. Many alternatives exist. Depending on your child's age and level of development, these may include simply redirecting your child's attention, offering choices, or using "time out."

Realize that Community Resources Add Value

Children need direct and continuing access to people with whom they can develop healthy, supportive relationships. To assist this, parents may:

- Take children to libraries, museums, movies, and sporting events.
- Enroll children in youth enrichment programs, such as sports or music.
- Use co mmunity services for family needs, such as parent education classes or respite care.
- Communicate regularly with childcare or school staff.
- Participate in religious or youth groups.

Seek Help If You Need It

Being a parent is difficult. No one expects you to know how to do it all. Challenges such as unemployment or a child with special needs can add to family tension. If you think stress may be affecting the way you treat your child, or if you just want the extra support that most parents need at some point, try the following:

- Talk to someone. Tell a friend, healthcare provider, or a leader in your faith community about what you are experiencing. Or, join a support group for parents. (See Circle of Parents™ and Parents Anonymous® Inc. in the resource directory on page 47 to locate a group near you.)
- Seek respite care when you need a break. Everyone needs time for themselves. Respite care or crisis care provides a safe place for your children so you can take care of yourself.
- Call a helpline. Most States have helplines for parents. Childhelp USA® offers a national 24-hour hotline (1-800-4-A-CHILD) for parents who need help or parenting advice.
- Seek counseling. Individual, couple, or family counseling can identify and reinforce healthy ways to communicate and parent.
- Take a parenting class. No one is born knowing how to be a good parent. It is an acquired skill. Parenting classes can give you the skills you need to raise a happy, healthy child.
- Accept help. You do not have to do it all. Accept offers of help from trusted family, friends, and neighbors. Do not be afraid to ask for help if you feel that you need it.