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SP487-A-The Challenge of Being a Parent

The University of Tennessee Agricultural Extension Service

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PRINCIPLES OF Parenting

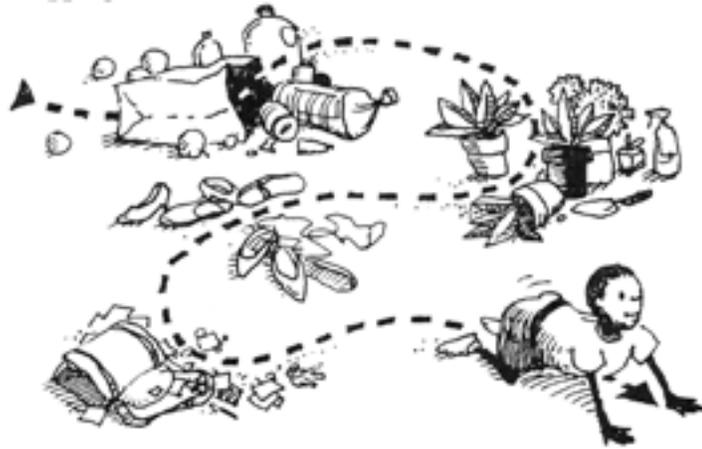
the Challenge of Being a Parent



Of all the jobs in the world, being a parent may be the trickiest. Children are often hard to understand. They seem impossible to control. Sometimes, no matter how hard we try, it seems that everything we do is wrong. No one can make parenting easy. But by learning more about children and their needs and by talking to other parents, we can learn many things to make us more effective as parents. In this series, Principles of Parenting, we hope we can help you find ways to be more effective. We also hope you will talk with other parents who can give you good ideas.



Johnny loved to explore and play with things. But his mother didn't like to let him handle her things. She was always yelling at him, taking things away from him and slapping his hands.



What are the most important things parents can do for their children?

How can you tell when you are a successful parent? What are the qualities you most want your children to develop? One child psychologist suggested that there are two qualities that are most important for children—and all people—to develop.

The first quality is to be strong. Children should learn to make decisions, to be responsible and to be trustworthy. They should learn how to deal with difficult situations.

The second quality is to be caring. Children should learn to love and be loved, to care about people, to show respect, and to be close with their families and others.

Developing both strength and caring is important, but it is not easy. This publication will give you ideas about how to help your children develop both qualities.



How can we develop strong children?

What experiences do you think will help children become strong, capable people?

Do you think Johnny's mother was teaching him to be strong? Or do you think Johnny was learning that the world is a dangerous place?

If Johnny is to become a strong, capable person, he needs to see his world as a safe and predictable place. In order to learn that his world is safe, he should not be hurt or frightened. He needs to explore and experiment within safe limits. If he is to learn that his world is predictable, he should find that the important people in his life are consistent and treat him with respect.

Imagine that you are a child—your child. Do you think that you would see your home as a safe and predictable place? Close your eyes and imagine a day at your house as a child. Are you given many opportunities to explore?

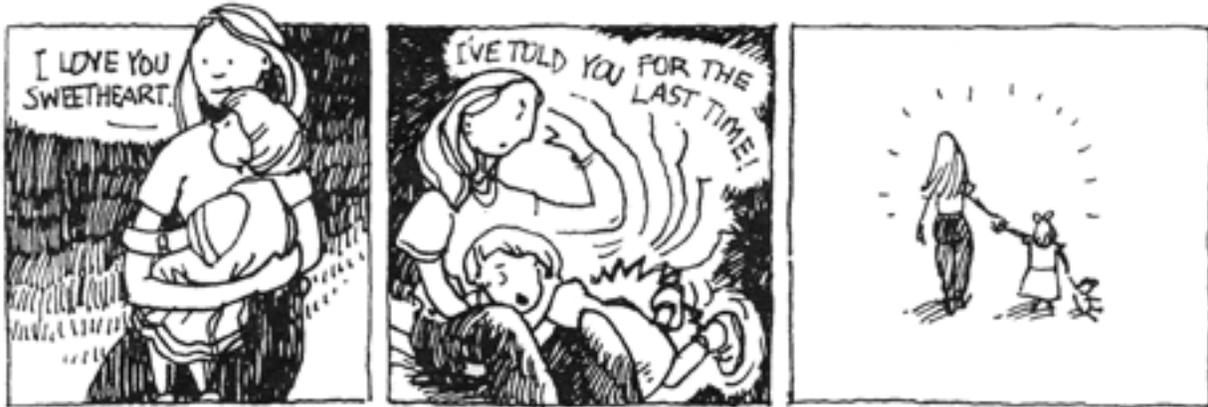
If it seems that people are usually unkind and controlling in your home, you will want to make some changes. Can you move unsafe toys out of the children's way? Can you provide fun and safe things for the children to play with? When your child is playing with something unsafe can you kindly redirect him or her toward some other toy or activity?

The Principles of Parenting series has several publications that can help you develop strong children:

- Meeting Children's Needs (SP489-A)
- Communication: Building a Strong Bridge Between You and Your Children (SP489-B)
- Something Better Than Punishment (SP489-C)

You may not yet be sure how to help your child become a strong person. These publications can help you.

Mary really loved her daughter; but she was always stressed-out or tired. She yelled at her daughter and spanked her a lot.



How can we develop caring children?

What experiences do you think will help children become caring, loving people?

Do you think Mary's child was learning to be a caring, loving person? What message do you think the child was getting from her mother? Even though Mary really loved her child, the child probably did not feel loved.

If a child is to become a caring, loving person, she needs to see her world as a loving and sensitive place. When parents take time to understand a child's needs and to be helpful, they are helping the child to feel loved.

Once again, imagine that you are your own child. From that point of view, do you see your home as a caring and loving place? Do people take time to understand your feelings? Do they express their love? Do they show that

they love each other? When they make mistakes, do they try to find better ways to help?

If it seems that people are often unloving or unkind at your home, you will want to make some changes. Can you find ways to deal with your stress? Can you find ways to guide your child without getting angry? Can you find ways to send the message of love to your child?

The Principles of Parenting series has several publications that can help you develop caring children:

- Enjoying Each Child as an Individual (SP488-A)
- Being Understanding: A Key to Developing Healthy Children (SP488-B)
- Sending Messages of Love (SP488-C)
- Building a Positive Relationship With Your Child (SP488-D)

You may not yet be sure how to help your child become a caring person. These publications will give you some useful ideas.

When we review how we are doing as parents, we can ask ourselves the two basic questions:

Am I helping my child develop into a strong person by setting reasonable rules and consistently enforcing them?
Am I helping my child develop into a caring person by being loving and sensitive?

Good parenting pays off.

You work at becoming a good parent so that your children will turn out to be strong, caring adults. But what are the benefits for you? Does being a good parent take tons of work and leave you worn-out? Why go to all the trouble?

The fact is, good parenting is easier in the long run than poor parenting. Good parenting is like good car repair. When car repair is done by someone with good tools who understands the job, the car will run well. When a car is repaired by someone who knows little or is careless, the car is likely to be a big problem.

Poor parenting develops children who are more likely to be moody, angry, disobedient, immature and low in social ability. Good parenting develops children who are more likely to be happy, capable, responsible and enjoyable. Which kind of children do you prefer to live with?

Reading about parenting, taking classes in parenting and visiting with other good parents will help you be more effective. It does take effort to learn about children and to be a good parent. It takes time to reason with children, to read them stories and to follow up on rules. But it makes life more pleasant and helps you develop children you will be proud of.



Each parent is different.

Each parent has different strengths and weaknesses. If you are a very caring parent already, you may find that you need to spend most of your effort learning how to be strong and set limits. If you are a very strong person, you may need to practice being understanding and sending messages of love.

Each child is different.

Just as with parents, each child has different strengths and weaknesses. You may have one child who craves excitement. You may have one who loves to be cuddled. The differences between children make parenting exciting but also challenging. We must work at understanding each child and his or her unique abilities and needs.

Parents need help, too.

A happy parent is a better parent than one who is unhappy. Therefore, it is important to strengthen you, the parent. For that reason, this series also includes a publication to help you deal with stress:

- Taking Care of the Parent: Replacing Stress With Peace(SP487-B)

Here are some other publications that can help you deal with the challenges parents face:

- Building Family Strengths (SP487-C)
- Strengthening Your Marriage (SP487-E)
- Now That We're Divorced, How Can We Parent Together (SP487-F)
- Helping Your Children Succeed at Learning (SP487-D)

Parenting is hard. But as you develop confidence in your parenting skills and see your children develop into fine people, you will know that it was all worth the effort!

This publication was originally written by H. Wallace Goddard for the Alabama Cooperative Extension Service and has been adapted for use in Tennessee. Contact person for this publication is Denise J. Brandon, Associate Professor, Family & Consumer Sciences, University of Tennessee Extension.

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