

PARENTING TIP OF THE MONTH!

These parenting tips are produced in the Diocese of Hamilton for distribution to parishes and insertion in parish bulletins. If you would like to have future tips sent to you or have questions or comments, please don't hesitate to contact Teresa Hartnett at 905-528-7988 ext. 250 or e-mail at thartnett@hamiltondiocese.com.

Tip # 1 - Stop for a moment and ask yourself, "What do I want my child's and my relationship to be?" If you want to be close to your children there are ways to create a strong bond. Are you spending time each day talking, do you do fun things together, do you pray together? If you do these three things with your child, a solid bond will develop between you, no matter the age of your child.

Tip # 2 - Learn To Listen

Good communication is the essential ingredient in all healthy relationships. If we want to know our children and make them feel important, we need to listen to them attentively. During conversation be sure to look at your child and make eye contact, be aware of the power of your body language and listen with respect to their ideas and opinions. In conversation make the rule 'dialogue, not lecture' your motto!

Tip # 3 - Accentuate the Positive

Compliments and encouragement can go a long way towards changing poor behaviours and building self-esteem. Accentuate positive behaviours by praising children of any age when they undertake appropriate actions. By simply letting children know we've noticed their good behaviours, we can have a direct effect on the number of times they undertake these actions. "Thank you for...", or "Good for you for", are great starts in creating a positive environment in your children's lives.

Tip # 4 - Car Time Can Be Quality Time!

Make use of the time you will spend with your children in the car by becoming a listener instead of a questioner. Refrain from asking questions about whether chores etc. have been done and let your children take the lead in conversations. If they are quiet, give them some time, you may be surprised at what issues or concerns will be raised. You can also ask one leading question and see where it goes, such as: "Have you got any questions about life that are on your mind?" or "Is there something you'd like to share with me if I promise not to yell?" - and then make sure you don't!

Tip # 5 - Action Plans Work!

As you and your children begin preparing for school with back packs, pens and notebooks, take some time to sit with your child and plan for success. Ask them what their goal for the upcoming school year is, calmly let them know your reasons for wanting their educational year to be a good one and then help them put together an action plan. Be specific, write it down and post it where everyone can see it to ensure success. Include things like: when will homework be done, who will be asked for help, how can they set time lines for projects etc. A collaborative strategy now will result in successful days ahead!

Tip # 6 - Family Meal Tim

As the busy fall season begins, sports, activities and school compete with family time. It is important to schedule time for each other. Sharing, communicating and spending time together helps connect members of a family and there is no better way to do this, than to share at least one meal together every day. Make time for it - everyone will benefit!

Tip # 7 - We all make mistakes and as parents we can teach our children that mistakes are opportunities to learn. Teach your child to use the ‘Three R’s’ of recovery after they make a mistake: Recognize their mistake; Reconcile with a willingness to say they are sorry; and Resolve by focussing on solutions instead of laying blame. When we model the ‘Three R’s’ everyone learns!

Tip # 8 - The internet can be a great resource to children, but it can also be fraught with danger. Parents need to be actively involved in monitoring the use of the internet when it is present in their home. Placing your computer in a high traffic area, using programs to control access to unwanted sites and strict rules about entering chat rooms can go a long way in protecting your children from proven dangers on the internet.

Tip # 9 - Christmas is a time of great joy and excitement for children who wait with anticipation to receive presents from Santa and other loved ones. Keeping Christ’s birth at the heart of the celebration can be hard, but not impossible . We can help our children focus on the true meaning of Christmas in the following ways: place the nativity scene as a focal point in your home; assist with or contribute to charity drives; read the story of Christ’s birth daily; engage in a small advent lighting ceremony each week of advent as a family; on Christmas morning sing “Happy Birthday” to Jesus before you open up the gifts under tree. Christmas holds a deeper meaning for all when we stay focussed on its true meaning.

Tip # 10 - The new year is a time for all of us to reflect on the past and see if positive changes are needed in our lives. Are there changes you would like to see in your family - more time spent together, a greater number of meals shared as a family, increased sharing of events in each others lives, or an increase in peaceful family time? Discuss what changes each family member would like to see and then write out an action plan - a how to, so you will accomplish one or two of your goals. Your children will learn how to set goals and action plans, while all of you will benefit from positive changes that will strengthen your relationship as a family.

Tip # 11 - In February we celebrate love with Valentine’s Day. Our family consists of those we love most and we need to express this regularly. Say “I love you” to your children each day - as

concrete learners they need to hear the words. Don't forget the importance of hugs and a special treat now and then, especially for older children. If you have more than one child, spending time alone with each child is essential in helping them feel important as an individual.

Tip # 12 - Quality or quantity, this has long been the debate about what children need in terms of contact with their parents. The truth of course is that they need both. Quality time is important - this includes any time you are actually focussed for a time on what you are doing with your child. This can include going for a walk, playing games, going to a movie or sharing some other fun activity. Quantity of time spent together is also vital to healthy family relationships. Just being present, or in close proximity, means your children can talk to you the moment something crosses their mind. Your presence makes them feel secure and important - don't underestimate its power, especially with older children.

Tip # 13 - The art of discipline can be very complicated, but how we view discipline can have a profound impact. Discipline should not be seen as tool to be used only after a problem, but it should be used as a tool to prevent a problem. Children of all ages need to hear clear and exact expectations of their behaviour and the consequence if they do not behave in this manner. The child is then armed with the tools for success. Following through with a consequence is important, but helping prevent the poor behaviour in the first place is even better.

Tip # 14 - Undertaking household chores together gives children of all ages a sense of belonging. Placing a list of specific chores each person is to complete, assigning equal work loads (as much as possible) and having an assigned time when everyone will clean, will help to create a more cohesive cleaning unit. Sharing chores as a family will create a family bond and develop a sense of responsibility in your children.

Tip # 15 – To create a healthy family we must use good communication skills. The three major components of good communication are speaking, listening and negotiating. We have to learn how to communicate efficiently and skilfully. When speaking use “I” statements and description not judgement; when listening repeat back what you heard, reflect on the content & feelings expressed; when negotiating commit to cooperation, find a deal that works for everyone, and look for areas of common agreement. Communication – a skill for every part of your life.

Tip # 16 – As September begins it is an important time to establish routines that will help our children function to the best of their ability. Talk to your children about the importance of good nutrition (and make lunches that reflect your words), the importance of a **full** nights sleep (8-10 hours for children of all ages) and the importance of physical activity (proven in research to assist children learn). With established routines you can make sure these three important elements become part of your child's lifestyle.

Tip # 17 – Every child born is a unique individual with a genetic code and a personality all their own. All children will go through the same ages and stages as they grow, but no two children will act exactly the same. For this reason a ‘one size fits all’ method of parenting will not work for all children. From a very early age you will witness your child's innate temperament and personality. Use this knowledge to tailor your interactions with your child to meet their needs. Understanding who your child is can help you understand why they respond as they do in certain situations. It will also help you accept them for who they are, while gently teaching them the self-discipline tools they will need to help them manage their natural inclinations.

Tip # 18 - From the moment a child is born they are watching others to learn how to behave. Your children become what they observe. As parents, it is important that we take time to reflect on what our children are observing and hearing from us, because this is the way they will act and speak. Each action and each word spoken sends a message to your children. Are you sending the message you want your child to receive?

Tip # 19 - This is the season of Christmas and a time of great business for most families. As parents we must find a balance between our faith practises at Christmas and the commercial side of Christmas. We spend hours shopping, decorating, baking and preparing to celebrate. Take the time to balance all the hustle and bustle by concentrating on the faith dimension of Christmas. Try having some quiet reflection time each day of Advent, reading the Christmas Story of Christ's birth as a family and by attending mass as a family. Make sure you pass on to your children the real 'reason for the season'!

Tip # 20 - Share your Values!

Television - with its portrayal of explicit sex, drug use and drinking in young adults as acceptable and normal - challenges you as a primary influence on your children every day. Children need to hear your voice and thoughts on these same topics daily. Remember, actions speak louder than words, so know your values, speak about them as they show up in daily life situations and be sure to practice in actions, what you are saying with words.

