

WHEN DO PARENTING SKILLS START?

by Marianne Theuma I.C.C.E. Tel: 2163 6735 www.inthefamilyway.net

Ask any teacher, and you will be told that children, even at kindergarten level, come to school already equipped with a set menu of characteristics and behaviour patterns which are not easy to change. Teachers declare that it is the parents' job to 'mould' their children's character, while parents go through considerable trouble trying to find the best school possible which will influence their child's behaviour. Whose responsibility is it to prepare children today to become the responsible adults we all wish for the future?

Nature vs Nurture

Are character traits acquired by heredity or by the environment in which we are brought up? If we opt for heredity, there is little we can do to change things. The environment for our children, on the other hand, is our responsibility as parents. Are we ready to face this responsibility and play an active part, or would we rather lay back and accept things as they are, believing there is nothing we can do?

Children's perception of the world depends a lot on what parents offer through their constant interaction with them. In other words, parents are constantly being watched by their children, and later copied. Believe it or not, this is where we have acquired our own Parenting Skills, when we were children ourselves, observing and absorbing what was happening within our own family. This is where our perception of our 'self' and the world around us has evolved.

Children grow up knowing the way their parents react to the everyday events that happen in a family. It is their guideline to what needs to be done in any particular situation. They write it in their mental 'diary', taking note as they go along life. It becomes their Bible. It is then copied many years later, when they are adults themselves bringing up their own children. Without knowing, they find themselves repeating the same methods their parents had adopted towards them. It is interesting to note that this becomes so ingrained, that even when parents are determined not to treat their children the way they were treated, subconsciously, they find themselves doing the same things the same way their parents did, one generation later. In the absence of proper education for parenthood, THIS IS THE ONLY PARENTING THEY KNOW!

This puts the parent in an awkward situation, making one realise that parenting is not at all an easy task. It really is a heavy burden of responsibility to be carried throughout one's lifetime as an ongoing project, but most especially during the early years of a child. Once the blue line on your pregnancy test shows Positive, you are a parent forever! It becomes your duty to find ways to acquire the right skills to make a success out of parenting your child. Following a good programme of various parenting skills will inspire you to use alternative or more appropriate styles of parenting.

Here are some useful tips that could set you up with a good start to becoming a great parent :

- Be knowledgeable. Inform yourself in various necessary skills from the right sources. The right skills for professional management are the right skills for parenting, namely, Personal and Interpersonal skills, Human Resource management, Time management, Money management, Safety and First Aid, etc.- a vast repertoire indeed!
 - Learn to feel good about yourself. Your self-esteem and self-confidence, or the lack of them, will be transmitted to your children.
 - Train yourself in positive thinking. Include it in your everyday life, creating the right situations and making the right choices which help you stay positive. This is recommended most especially when facing life's challenges and events, such as the birth of your baby, which is a highly important milestone and a turning point in every parent's life story.
 - Work on your relationships. Learn communication skills and practise with your partner. Your relationship as a couple has a direct effect on your pregnancy, on your birth experience and on your life. Start positive communication with your baby while still in the womb, massaging the pregnant belly, and mentally 'talking' to the baby inside, sharing a song or reading a story. Keep this up after the birth for as long as you and your child enjoy it.
 - Play with your child. Adopt and model the behaviour you want from your children, making sure that your tone of voice and your body language are in line with the words you say. Be consistent.
 - Enjoy your parenting. Forgive yourself mistakes! Apologise, if need be. Remember that mistakes are for learning.



available from