

From the Heart...

...Life Skills for Today's Family

By Sharon L. Benedict MS



Childcare . . . Sounds of Joy

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Sept. 7, 2012)

Lately, I have been getting a lot of videos and the cutest pictures of my seven year old grandson, Jasper, or as I nicknamed him, "Jazz." He loves to dance and "make moves" all his own.

Oh, how fast they grow up! And what Nana doesn't look back in that photo album to reflect on how adorable a baby he was, and still is. In fact, how can anyone pass by without blurting out the "oohs and aahs" at a sweet baby's presence! I sure can't. When you look into their little, glowing eyes, I can't help but see the wonder of God's love all wrapped up in those sweet sounds of joy and trust coming from that little bundle. How my own precious daughters forever changed me! I never knew how easy it was to love them without them doing anything! Just being who they are.

Being a parent is by far one of the most miraculous and challenging experiences in life. Our children forever change us. They will be the ones who watch us grow older and hopefully wiser. They will not only learn from us but will also teach us about the world they know. They will also be the ones we will need to depend on in our elder years. So remember these words from Phyllis Diller, "Always be nice to your children because they are the ones who will choose your rest home."

How could anyone not be "nice" to a baby and toddler about to make that *first step!* Unfortunately, we, as parents, bring to parenthood our own history, beliefs, and

behavior; and some are “not so nice.” Tragically, child abuse casts a shadow that can last our lifetime and those of our children. However, my own personal journey back to wholeness testifies to the miracle of forgiveness, hope, and rebuilding trust.

Yet, abuse is still a pervasive part of our communities. According to Childhelp organization recent reports (www.childhelp.org), “Four-fifths (78.3%) of unique victims were neglected, 17.6 percent were physically abused, 9.2 percent were sexually abused, 8.1 percent were psychologically maltreated, and 2.4 percent were medically neglected. In addition, 10.3 percent of victims experienced such “other” types of maltreatment as “abandonment,” “threats of harm to the child,” or “congenital drug addiction.” States may code any maltreatment as “other” if it does not fall into one of the NCANDS categories listed above. These percentages sum to more than 100.0 percent because a child may have suffered more than one type of maltreatment.” In 2010, 10 children in a 1000 were victims of child abuse or neglect (<http://www.childwelfare.gov>). Then add to those numbers, the emotionally and impassioned issue between pro-life and pro-choice.

For my readers, I am pro-life. Yet, no one can be truly pro-life if we are not also pro-care. Our compassion must be there not only for the unborn but also for the pregnant woman as well as the father. It is never an easy journey for all involved. The circumstances have a valid place in the journey. Choice is at the center of the journey for anyone in either camp.

I am not the expert here but only one woman who personally believes the fetus is a child getting ready to meet Mom and Dad. As I write this article, the memories flood my heart. My younger single daughter became pregnant. I remember well, on the way moving back to Texas from California, she called with

the news. She said, "Mom, no matter the circumstances I am currently in, I know what is growing inside me is my child; I choose not to abort; and I will go through the pregnancy, birth my baby, and love my child throughout life."

What an amazing moment when we all saw the sonogram pictures of the baby so well developed but only 6 months into the pregnancy. I will never forget her courage and strength as she went through those months and the years that have followed. What amazing feats of perseverance and miracle outcomes along the way I witnessed in my daughter.

I hope you too experience those miracles as you contemplate parenthood and raise your children into adulthood. In the meantime, the next issue will cover some helpful information and resources for this month's topic, *Childcare*.

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From the Heart...

...Life Skills for Today's Family

By Sharon L. Benedict MS



Childcare . . . The Early Years

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Sept. 14, 2012)

The first words your baby utters are probably one of the more thoroughly enjoyable moments in a Mom and Dad's early months of being parents. They may be "Ma..ma or Da..da. But be prepared for some other words coming forth, such as, "duc...(for duck), ca...(for cat), ba...(for ball). Infants and toddlers are keenly aware of your own routine mutterings. Baby will not only recognize Mommy and Daddy, laugh, squeal, and smile spontaneously, but may decide to utter one of your expletives that leaks out within hearing distance. So, I suggest if you don't want baby to adopt it (or frankly anyone else), leave such language behind you.

When hearing your voice, baby may become quiet, smile, get excited, and move his or her arms and legs. I remember those moments as the sweetest times to play, cuddle, and just watch them discover their bodies and life around them. Babies learn they have the ability to vocalize—cry, of course, but also blurt and blissfully babble on for hours!

The National Child Care Information Center (NCCIC)-our nation's federal Childcare Bureau, reported there are key issues in infant and toddler care that have developed over the past 10 years. New research has shown ". . . the infant brain is remarkably active and self-organizing, suggesting that opportunities for

self-initiated exploration in a supportive, stimulating environment are more important to cognitive growth than adult-directed teaching.”

Young children are innately curious; and as they reach toddler age, they love to explore, particularly in a safe, nurturing, and stimulating environment. They will understand what you are saying at a remarkable pace, if even they can't currently speak it. They will also challenge you with the word “no.” When they begin to form their own unique sentences, they will practice giving you instructions on how to play with their own toys! Enjoy being the student with them. Their young wisdom will surprise you when you allow them to safely stretch, explore, and build confidence.

As with us all, cognitive, social, and emotional development are interdependent. The NCCIC confirms that a sensitive, language-rich environment stimulates mental and language developments as well as relationships with others—incorporating children's interests and needs within secure relationships.

A young child's world is one of relationships—with parents and other caregivers. With a safe and nurturing environment, learning comes naturally. Children are then enthusiastic about learning. According to Kids Health, “the more interactive conversation and play a child is involved in, the more a child learns. Reading books, singing, playing word games, and simply talking to your child will increase his or her vocabulary while providing increased opportunities to develop listening skills.” Here are some tips offered to encourage your child's learning, reading, and communication skills:

- Help your child relate to books by selecting stories that mirror families like yours or people from your cultural or ethnic group.
- Keep books, magazines, and other reading material where your child is able to reach them without help.
- Help your child create his or her own "This Is Me" or "This Is Our Family" album with photographs or mementos.
- Talk with your child about books or TV programs and videos you watch together.
- Let your child see you reading and enjoying books.

Along with creating a safe physical and relational environment, early childhood healthcare/wellness is essential. Healthcare includes quality nutrition, exercise, enough rest, accident prevention, protection from environmental hazards, controlled substances, viruses, and chronic and severe stress.

Children are particularly vulnerable to the stress within families and the emotional state of caregivers. Interventions done early significantly determine the outcomes, both in terms of the child's health and well being but also the cost savings—compared to trying to remedy the problems later.

Remember to treasure every moment. Make the memories last by creatively recording all the magnificent things your child does. Through visits, pictures, sights, and sounds, introduce them to the whole family—aunts, uncles, grandparents. Create special moments of memories as my coaching colleague, Carolyn, does for her grandchildren. She creates memory boxes filled with all kinds of family memories—pictures representing spontaneous or specific

moments, little notes from friends with words of love and encouragement, notes from grandkids over the years, special occasion trinkets, and baby's first written words or drawings. Carolyn places these decorative boxes throughout the rooms in her home for family and guests to enjoy.

Be sure to cruise through the resources listed at the end of the article for some great information and helpful parenthood tips. In the meantime, don't miss one moment rolling on the floor with your young ones or playing together in the sandbox. And while the weather is still hot, splash together in the kiddie pool. Be a kid again yourself.

Resources:

Activities for Toddler Twins, <http://www.twinslist.org/toddler.htm>
Administration for Children and Families,
http://www.nifa.usda.gov/nea/family/part/childcare_part_nccic.html
Child Welfare Information Gateway, <http://www.childwelfare.gov>
Childcare.Gov, <http://www.childcare.gov/>, <http://www.childstats.gov/>,
http://www.childcare.gov/xhtml/links/g_1/index.html
Focus on the Family, www.family.org
Kids Health, <http://www.kidshealth.org/kid/>
Program for Infant & Toddler Care, <http://www.pitc.org/>

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From the Heart...

...Life Skills for Today's Family

By Sharon L. Benedict MS



Childcare . . . Growing Pains

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Sept. 21, 2012)

Let's revisit one of the first articles I wrote back in 2006. I think you will find it just as appropriate now as then. Enjoy.

Once you live through the late night feedings, toddler temper tantrums, and the "Mommy, I don't want to go to school today" blues, you wonder what's next. Well, friend, you are about to embark on a whole new parenting journey!

From adolescence throughout the teen years, both your child and you will experience periods of intense growth and development—physically, intellectually, morally. During this time of growing up most families experience a myriad of confusing signals and potential turmoil. Yet, don't let this frighten you. You have lots of parental company! There are also many wonderful and exciting moments to share with your emerging teen.

When does adolescence begin? Barbara P. Homeier, MD, advises us parents to send this message to our kids: "Everybody's different (<http://kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/behavior/adolescence.html>). There are early bloomers, late arrivals, speedy developers, and slow-but-steady growers." There are the more obvious signs of approaching adulthood through the teenage years with sexual development characteristics. However, ". . .children between the ages of 10 and 14 (or even younger) can also be going through a bunch of

changes that aren't readily seen from the outside. These are the changes of adolescence.”

Here are the more typical early adolescence signals:

- A fairly dramatic change in behavior around their parents—
separate from Mom & Dad, more independent
- Increasingly aware of how others, especially their peers, see them and they're desperately trying to fit in
- Start "trying on" different looks and identities
- Become acutely aware of how they differ from their peers, which can result in episodes of distress and conflict with parents

As children more closely approach teenage years, parents often experience an acceleration of these signals. Homeier considers one of the primary signals is ***Butting Heads***. The ***Primary Goal Is Independence***. The stereotype of an adolescent teen is rebellious, wild, and at odds with Mom and Dad. “Although . . . this is a time of emotional ups and downs, that stereotype certainly is not representative of most teens.” Teens will start pulling away and have different opinions, especially with their closest parent. They will start to form their own moral code, testing the limits in some form of thought, speech, and behavior.

Homeier suggests you ask yourself these questions:

“Am I a controlling parent?”

"Do I allow my child's opinions and tastes to differ from my own?"

As you consider these questions, here is a summary of her first two roadmap tips for parenting during the adolescent/teen years:

- **Educate Yourself**—Read books about teenagers. Think back to your own teen years—your struggles with acne or embarrassment at developing early or late. Expect some mood changes in your usually happy child, and be prepared for more conflict as he or she finds his or her way as an individual. Parents who know what's coming can cope with it better. And the more you know, the better you can prepare your child.
- **Talk to Your Children Early Enough**—Answer the early questions (without information overload) about their bodies, the differences between boys and girls, where babies come from. Offer age-appropriate book; share your own memories in a way that helps ease their worries. When you hear them joking/talking about sex, try these questions:

Are you noticing any changes in your body?

Are you having any strange feelings?

Are you sad sometimes and don't know why?

Starting an annual physical exam just prior to seeing changes happen is a great time to bring up these things with your doctor together. Most misconceptions and embarrassment can then be avoided.

In the final month's issue next week on *Childcare*, more teen parenting tips will be offered plus some great resources to check out. Until then, do some creative thinking this week on how you and your growing adolescent teen can have some fun together. Be sure to ask them what they would like to do that they are particularly interested in. No matter what, have fun together!

Resources:

Activities for Toddler Twins, <http://www.twinslist.org/toddler.htm>
Administration for Children and Families,
http://www.nifa.usda.gov/nea/family/part/childcare_part_nccic.html
Child Welfare Information Gateway, <http://www.childwelfare.gov>
Childcare.Gov, <http://www.childcare.gov/>, <http://www.childstats.gov/>,
http://www.childcare.gov/xhtml/links/g_1/index.html
Focus on the Family, www.family.org
Kids Health, <http://www.kidshealth.org/kid/>
Program for Infant & Toddler Care, <http://www.pitc.org/>

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From the Heart...

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By Sharon L. Benedict MS



Childcare . . . Sharing the Journey

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Sept. 28, 2012)

Let's revisit one more 2006 article I wrote on Childcare. I hope you will be encouraged to more fully share life's journey with your children, no matter their age or yours.

"What if...the basis of all story. The small child asks all the what ifs. All of life is story, story unraveling and revealing meaning." These words from Madeleine L'Engle in her book, *Walking on Water: Reflections on Faith and Art*, reveal the core of a child's heart and curiosity. As adults and parents we must also learn that our life with them is part of their story. Hopefully we too are embracing those lessons of life and wisdom as we journey with our children.

Charles Wadsworth, world famous pianist and creator of chamber music events around the globe, quipped that "by the time a man realizes that maybe his father was right, he usually has a son who thinks he's wrong." Wadsworth encourages us to go with the flow because the journey is for a lifetime; and life lessons are again learned from generation to generation.

Yet, what your teens have shared with you along the way does more than just comfort and give you hope for their future. Sonia Taitz (O Magazine, May 2003) offers this gem: "What children take from us, they give...We become people who feel more deeply, question more deeply, hurt more deeply, and love

more deeply.” No matter the challenges and struggles toward adulthood by both parent and child, the stories from teens and parents declare that the journey is well worth the climb. Here are few expressions of wisdom and love shared in their own words:

- A twenty-eight year old to Mom—“You have been my friend, my support, and my joy. I hope that you know how much you mean to me...everything.”
- An adult daughter to Dad—“I realized something lately. I don’t hide things from you or be afraid to tell you things because I think you will be mad or because I don’t want to deal with something, or it’s not important enough to me. It’s because ever since I was little I always looked up to you. You were my closest and favorite playmate as a child. You could answer every question I had. We had so many little dreams we talked about together. You taught me so many things and showed me all through life that you would be there to help us. I’m in admiration of you for everything you have accomplished in your life with everything you dealt with that I really don’t think I can ever capture in words how much I miss you being around me. You and Mom are to me the most special people, and I don’t think you guys know it. Sometimes I wish you could just put your arms around me for hours. I love you dad so much you may never understand...All I want is to make you proud of me and I want to see you happy.”
- Twenty-year old daughter to Mom & Dad—“You know looking back on everything we’ve been through as a family, I would do it all again a 1000

times to have what I call my family. Every frustration, trial and tribulation, I wouldn't trade for anything. You guys are my true, unconditional loves and I value our relationship and the relationship you and Mom have more highly than any earthly thing. I thank God every day for you."

- A mother's words to her adult children—Son, as a young child, I was always amazed at the wisdom you shared with me as we went through the grief of losing Paul, your brother. I knew from what you were saying that God was using you as an instrument to comfort me. Karen, you are such a compassionate person. I am amazed how you have always looked at people with what they could be and not what they are. I wish I had the eyes to see what you see. Because my perception was a little more of who they are right now, and you always saw more of the possibilities of what they could be. Thank you for being my precious children.

As you read these words given to parents and their grown children, what would you like to say to your own children...to your parents? Do you think it's time to tell them how special they are and how they have changed your life for the better? When you do, you will find your words become a valuable gift they will treasure throughout their lives.

For the months of October (Lifeskill: Recreation/Entertainment) and November (Lifeskill: Reflection), you will read interviews from public and private community leaders on what they see for Boerne and Kendall County's future.

Stay tuned for some timely and insightful input you won't want to miss.

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