

# *From the Heart...*

## *... Life Skills for Today*

*By Sharon L. Benedict MS, ACC*



## ***Childcare-Bundles of Joy***

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 little bundles of joy and trust. 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. In 2004, approximately 872,000 American children 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 year after the birth. I am also continually amazed and proud at how she and the father have worked hard on their relationship to nurture a safe and loving environment for their son. They were determined to seek help, wise counsel, and support. As a traditionalist Mom & Grandma, I am ever hopeful to get a phone call soon that

they have made the decision to officially marry and publicly commit to a lifetime of love together! Am I naïve here? I don't think so. I've seen too many miracles in my life time to believe otherwise.

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. . .*

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## ***Childcare-Infants & Toddlers***

“Ma..ma. Da..da.” 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. 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. That’s when I started seeing their personality surface as they started to be a more active and alert member of the family. Babies learn they have the ability to vocalize—cry, of course, but also blurt and blissfully babble on for hours!

Enjoy every sound while you are a central to their lives. They grow up so fast. Your tiny child is actively learning about touch, sights, sounds, feelings, and curiously random thoughts. The National Child Care Information Center-our

nation's federal Childcare Bureau (<http://nccic.org/>), reports 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.”

Research reports are wonderful tools for helping us understand what most parents see in their children every day. 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” themselves. 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 on their own.

As with all of us 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

([www.kidshealth.org](http://www.kidshealth.org)), “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, then, 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.

When Carolyn visits or baby sits her grandkids, she also brings her “*MaMa C*” bag filled with goodies, small toys, even night lites. *MaMa C* is her grandkid's name for Carolyn. After a big hug, you can bet the first words are “Where is your *MaMa C* bag?” So, if you would like some help creating your own signature grandma bag, feel free to call or email Carolyn at (210) 787-9387 or [carolyn@truthcoaching.com](mailto:carolyn@truthcoaching.com).

In addition, spend some time cruising 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, don't miss splashing together in the kiddie pool and be a kid again yourself.

Resources:

Activities for Toddler Twins, <http://www.twinslist.org/toddler.htm>  
Administration for Children and Families, <http://nccic.org/>  
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](http://www.childcare.gov/xhtml/links/g_1/index.html)  
Focus on the Family, [www.family.org](http://www.family.org)  
Kids Health, <http://www.kidshealth.org/kid/>  
Program for Infant & Toddler Care, <http://www.pitc.org/>

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## ***Childcare-Adolescence Begins***

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!

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## **Childcare-Teen Year Tips**

In the last issue, Barbara P. Homeier, MD, from *KidsHealth.org* (<http://kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/behavior/adolescence.html>) gave parents some basic tips for the teen years. The first two were—to educate yourself about teenage development and talk to your children early enough about their bodies and sexuality. Here is a summary of her other helpful tips to ease the inevitable confusion and tension parents go through:

- **Put Yourself in Your Child's Place**—Be empathic and help your child understand that it's normal to be a bit concerned or self-conscious. It's just fine to feel grown-up one minute and like a little child the next.
- **Pick Your Battles**—If teenagers want to dye their hair, paint their fingernails black, or wear funky clothes, it may be worth thinking twice before you object. Being flexible about the more harmless things helps you focus more on what really matter, like tobacco, drugs and alcohol.
- **Maintain Your Expectations**—Teens will likely act unhappy with expectations their parents place on them. However, they usually understand and need to know that their parents care enough about them to expect things from them. Appropriate grades, behavior, and adherence to the rules of the

house are important standards to maintain. If parents have appropriate expectations, teens will likely try to meet them.

- **Inform Your Teen - and Stay Informed Yourself**—The teen years often are a time of experimentation, and sometimes that experimentation includes risky behaviors. Don't avoid the subjects of sex, or drug, alcohol, and tobacco use; discussing these things openly before they are exposed to them increases the chance that your teen will act responsibly. Know your child's friends and their parents. Regular communication between the parents of adolescents can go a long way toward creating a safe environment for all the children in a peer group.
- **Know the Warning Signs**—Change is normal during the teen years. Yet, too drastic or long-lasting may signal trouble. Watch for warning signs that go on for more than six weeks, such as extreme weight gain or loss, sleep problems, rapid, drastic changes in personality, sudden change in friends, skipping school continually, falling grades, talk or even jokes about suicide, signs of tobacco, alcohol, or drug use, run-ins with the law . If any are evident, seek appropriate help.
- **Respect Your Child's Privacy**—To help your teen become a young adult, you'll need to grant some privacy. However, if there are warning signs evident, go ahead and check things out to get to the heart of the problem. If all is well, then give your child space and appropriate privacy—such as your teenager's room and phone calls. Yet, for safety reasons (hopefully without

knowing every detail), always know where your child is going, doing, and with whom.

- **Monitor What Your Child Sees and Reads**—Know what your child is watching and reading (TV shows, magazines and books, Internet). Set time limits for computer and TV use; and who they are communicating with online.
- **Make Appropriate Rules**—Whatever rules you set, allow those rules to bend a little as they grow through adolescence and teen years—including bedtime, rewards for trusting, family outings.
- **Will This Ever Be Over?**—As your child moves through the teen years, he or she will become more independent, responsible, communicative.

Homeier offers this motto for parents with teens: “We’re going through this together, and we’ll come out of it - together!” Although some parents and adults have negative perceptions about teens, you will find most are energetic, thoughtful, even idealistic, and want to be fair and do what is right.

So parents, enjoy the ride as your child matures into adulthood. With your unconditional love, support, and greatest hopes, your teen will face the same choices you too made with each passing year. May your grown children say to you one day, “Mom, Dad, you were right all along. Thank you for being my parents. I love you both.”

Below are a number of helpful resources for you to check out. For next week’s final issue on *Childcare*, I would love to hear from you about your experiences raising your children through adolescent teen years. What lessons of life and wisdom have you gained from the journey with your children? What

important part of your teen's life have they shared with you along the way? What challenges and struggles have you both lived through together that you would like to share with my readers (your name will be changed to insure privacy)?

Here's my email address to respond by next Tuesday:

[seekreachachieve@gvtc.com](mailto:seekreachachieve@gvtc.com).

Resources:

American Library Association, Kids, the Internet, Learning—

<http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/foryoungpeople/youngpeopleparents/especialyyoungpeople.htm>

Focus on the Family, [www.family.org](http://www.family.org)

Forum on Child & Family Statistics, <http://www.childstats.gov/>

Kids Health, <http://www.kidshealth.org/kid/>, <http://www.kidshealth.org/teen/>

National Child Care Information Center, <http://nccic.org/>

National Geographic for Kids, <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/kids>

National Network for Childcare, <http://www.nncc.org/>

US Dept of Education, Choosing Your Child's School and After-care—

[http://www.ed.gov/parents/schools/find/choose/pub\\_pg4.html](http://www.ed.gov/parents/schools/find/choose/pub_pg4.html)

Building a Life, <http://www.sexrespect.com>

Child's Trends Databank, <http://www.childtrends.databank.org/WhatWorks.cfm>

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## ***Childcare-The shared journey***

"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) offer 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.

“See” you next month on the topic, *Recreation & Entertainment*, having fun that refreshes, helps you chill out and laugh a little or a lot, and supports wholeness in your life.

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