

Giving Children a Voice

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The Transforming Role of the Family

Edited by

Catherine Bernard and John Shea

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To the Youth and Children of Our World

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PREFACE

The global congress on “*Giving Children a Voice—The Transforming Role of the Family in a Global Society*” was held at New Delhi, India, in January 2009. It was organized by Service and Research Institute on Family and Children (SERFAC), a nongovernmental organization based in Chennai, India.

SERFAC, previously known as Service and Research Foundation of Asia on Family and Culture, was given its present name at the congress. It enjoys Special Consultative Status with ECOSOC of the United Nations.

The congress was unique in that it brought together over 150 experts and professionals from 25 countries, and a parallel children’s congress was simultaneously organized, attended by 40 child delegates drawn from 28 countries. During one panel session, the children addressed an audience of adults, making known to them their thinking and experiences, and called upon the adult world to be attentive to them and listen to what they have to say to us.

These and other moving experiences at the congress prompted us to compile papers presented there into a book to make it available to a larger audience the world over.

The papers in this volume challenge the stereotypes of what children and families are expected to be and do. They challenge society at large to note the seriousness of child abuse, and the impact of technology on children. They also raise questions on the rights of the child, and the role of parenthood in today’s contexts.

The papers have been updated for this publication. This volume, I hope, will be a perennial source of inspiration to all persons who deal with children, and an excellent resource manual for those in professional practice and/or those wishing to further their research.

We at SERFAC believe that the contents of this book can and will be a potent vehicle to build a more humane, caring and technologically balanced world where knowledge sharing, coupled with delicate human

love, will enrich each of us with the wisdom that holds the key to the future—this is what Family is all about. This is what children want and need. With this, the Family will become a capable institution where parents guide the young, and together they transform our globalized and globalizing world order, making it a haven of peace and security for our children.

The future of the world is in the hands of our children. Society today often fails to hear the wake-up call embedded in the happenings of the world, which in many ways is driven by technology and concerns of profit at the cost of human lives, especially the lives of children. The future is for the children of today—we need to give it to them today.

Dr. Catherine Bernard
Founder-Director, SERFAC

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to the members of the Planning Committee of the Global Congress on *Giving Children a Voice—The Transforming Role of the Family*: Dr. H.B. Danesh of Canada, Prof. Victoria Thoresen of Norway, Dr. John Shea, of the US, Dr. Kim Khoo Choo of Singapore and Dr. Caroline de Leon of the Philippines, who, despite constraints of time and distance and their own commitments, met several times before the event to discuss and delve deep into the meaning and intricacies contained in the title of the congress. Their exemplary team spirit and commitment to the cause of children and family were manifest during the conduct of the congress.

I am proud to be associated with the outstanding and globally acclaimed resource persons who presented their papers and contributed to the excellent conduct of the workshops held during the congress. I am grateful to them for their contributions.

My special thanks to Ms. Karen Gonsalvez, who effectively conducted the parallel Congress for Children. The bonding that took place as the event for the children concluded was a sign of its impact, success, and meaningfulness to all.

I acknowledge with deep appreciation the support and contributions of Ms. Ann Gonsalvez, who assisted with the preparations and logistics which contributed to the successful conduct of the event.

I thank Mr. Pooran Pandey, Chief Executive of The Times Foundation, now Executive Director of Global Compact Network India, for the support and help offered for the success of the event.

Without the generous grants from the Agencies of Missio Aachen, Kindermissionswerk, Aachen and Missio Munich, all of Germany, and Holy Childhood, Rome, this Congress would not have been possible. I thank them.

To the dedicated staff of SERFAC, my sincere thanks.

To Ms. Susan Philip, for her care in editing and preparing the manuscript for printing, my special thanks.

My sincere thanks to the Cambridge Scholars Press for welcoming the proposal and publishing this book.

Dr. Catherine Bernard
Founder-Director, SERFAC

INTRODUCTION

Marking the 10th Anniversary of the International Year of The Family (IYF), the outcome document, 'A Celebration of the Family' stated: "The Family is a universal and irreplaceable community, rooted in human nature, that is the basis for all times. As the cradle of life and love for each new generation, the family is the primary source of personal identity, self-esteem and support for children. It is also the first and foremost school of life uniquely suited to teach children integrity, character, morals, responsibility, service and wisdom." (Administration for Children and Families, US Department of Health and Human Services, October 2006) The United Nations affirms that "The family provides the natural framework for the emotional, financial and material support essential to the growth and development of its members, particularly infants and children." (IYF No 18: Chapter 1, Section B-Societies and Family in Crises-No 18.October 1995, p 5)) A similar US document dated October 2004 highlighted the relationship of Marriage to Family when it stated that "Despite well-documented decline, the institution of marriage remains central to family life. Indeed, in bringing together two people in a lifelong bond, marriage creates new families. Marriage also links existing families in manners that invigorate and perpetuate both. Marriage weaves ties of belonging between the couple, their parents and extended kin, their anticipated children and society at large." (Administration for Children and Families, Department of Health and Human Services, October 2004).

While the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms that "men and women of full age have the right to marry and found a family," it also says that "Marriage is not so much about rights, but responsibilities. The married couple sets a pattern of sacrifice, duty and occupation that naturally flows with parental duties of raising and nurturing children." ('A Celebration of the Family'- Observance of the Tenth Anniversary of The International Year of The Family, Administration for Children and Families, US Department of Health and Human Services, October 2004 p 2 .Why Family MATTERS-The relationship of Marriage to Family)

These stark statements take the reader to the heart of this publication, which discusses the following:

1. Why Marriage and Family matter for children
2. How the Family is a microcosm of the larger world, and the impact of modern pressures on the Family
3. How parental attitudes affect children.
4. The Role of the State in supporting healthy marriages, strengthening two-parent families, and protecting children.

This book is a compilation of articles presented at the 12th International Conference and Third World Congress of the Service and Research Foundation of Asia on Family and Culture (SERFAC), Chennai, India. “*Giving Children a Voice: The Transforming Role of the Family in a Global Society*” was the theme of the conference, held in 2009.

Now, more than five years later, the issues facing children persist, and, if anything, have escalated. The contents of this book highlight the atrocities done to children. The concerns raised at the conference are even more of a reality today, and the remedial measures suggested at the conference by experts are as relevant as they were then.

The crucial ambience required for protecting the child and strengthening the voice of the child is the Family. The first chapter talks about the importance of the Family, the role it has to play in the safeguarding and development of children, and what parents can do to ensure the emergence of a responsible, well-adjusted generation.

Other chapters talk of the importance of child rights, the effects of globalization on families, the repercussions of sexual victimization of children, the stultifying impact of violence, neglect, and poverty on children, and the need for educating the adult on the tenets of responsible parenting.

The voices of eminent psychologists and sociologists working for and with children and families, heard through the following chapters, will hopefully convey to the thinking population of the 21st century, particularly the men and women who hold the responsibility of guiding the future of the world through policies and plans, that it is crucial to protect children and strengthen their voices which are often muffled or silenced by abuse, victimization, crime, domestic abuse, abandonment, poverty, labor, wars, pornography, crime, and similar atrocities.

The inherent goodness and sensitivities of children need to be captured in mature environments, be it at home, school, or workplace, and they need to be raised in a manner that allows them their childhood, their playfulness, laughter, and freedom, so as to enable an environment of identity to prevail when they reach adolescence, and maturity as they grow into adulthood.

Dr. Catherine Bernard

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1. Developed by the Administration for Children and Families, US Department of Health and Human Services, October 2006.
2. IYF. No.18: Chapter I, Section B – Societies and Family in Crises – No. 18, 1995, p5.
3. Developed by the Administration for Children and Families, Department of Health and Human Services, in October 2004.
4. 'A Celebration of the Family'—Observance of the tenth anniversary of the International year of The Family, Developed by the Administration for Children and Families, US Department of Health and Human Services, October 2004, p 2. Why Family Matters – The Relationship of Marriage to Family.

CHAPTER ONE

SECRETS OF A HEALTHY FAMILY

CATHERINE BERNARD

Introduction

Civic and religious leaders, political philosophers, social psychologists, historians, and a host of social and behavioral scientists refer to ‘Family’ as the foundation of society, cornerstone of civilization, potent vehicle for the transmission of culture, seedbed of virtues, medium for fostering social cohesion and religious harmony, and so on, at every level of the human spectrum. Yet, when we look around us, we are alarmed by the increase in domestic violence, social unrest, waging of wars, disrespect for moral and legal law, and the loss of value and respect for human life. Alongside, we experience an increase in delinquency, crime, and bribery. All of today’s offenders and war wagers were the children of not so long ago. For whatever reason, they are the products of improper training and education, perhaps of their generation and of generations of children before them.

They were perhaps deprived or/and stifled when they were children and now that they are adults, they are the wrong people, with the wrong voices in the wrong places, occupying wrong positions contributing to disharmony in society and the destruction of all human relationships and social safety nets, including the Family.

This Chapter—Secrets of a Healthy Family—does not ignore the risks and perils children and families face in our contemporary world. It is meant to offer a ray of hope to couples and families. Despite the unhealthy trends in society in general and nations in particular, the chapter focuses on a proactive approach and helps foster the understanding that “marriage and parenthood are unique, irreplaceable and indispensable institutions, and children are incarnations of love between husband and wife and gifts to humanity.” It hopes to help readers understand the necessary

environments that need to be created in the home in which children will be enabled to have a voice and exercise their voice as they grow into adulthood.

Why Marriage and Family Matter for Children

Marriage and family are the naturally created institutions that go hand in hand in establishing a family. Marriage is an incubator for personal development and socialization of children. It is an institution born out of “love,” for mutual acceptance and responsible living. Marriage also provides an ambience to enjoy life and relate with other people and function well in the world. Staying married is in many ways a paradox. Marriage needs to be nurtured more than nurturing children, as it is from this stability, security and safety net that healthy parenting flows. It must also be recognised that although marriage has undergone profound changes, it continues to be the most effective family structure in which to raise children.

A stable family meets the basic needs of children. “Caring for children remains the most generally recognized basic responsibility of families, because the human infant needs a great deal of care in order to survive. Human development requires emotional involvement and interaction with the child as well as physical care.” (UN IYF Occasional Papers Series 1992 No 2, *Family: Forms and Functions*). Statistics tell us that children with parents in stable marriages have more self-esteem and self-confidence, fare better in school, and are more appropriately socialized on average than children with parents in unhealthy and weak relationships.

Children in intact families spend more time with parents especially during mealtimes (evening meal most likely), compared to children from families where the husband–wife relationship is not sound. Adolescents from intact families are less likely to become addictive, sexually active, or social misfits. They are likely to have stable and healthy relationships, intact marriages, and families themselves, and are more likely to provide safe environments, healthy socialization, and nurturing homes to their children.

Children look to parents as models for security, warmth, and guidance. They learn from the father about being a man and treating women with respect, compassion and love, and being caring from the mother. Joe Beam in his article on Parenting says “Your marriage and parenting not only will help it but will also help them in the future. It will provide them a pleasant

home and marriage.” (Joe Beam, *Marriage Helper* 911). The author goes on to say “The good things in your marriage will usually trickle down to your children to come.”

In brief, “in a thriving family, not only do the members get along well together, but encourage each other’s accomplishments and allow each other to be successful. The mother as much as the father, the children as well as the parents, productive and confident, each family member is happy and a source of happiness for the others.” (Khalil A Khavari & Sue Williamston Khavari, *Creating a Successful Family*).

Impact of Modern Pressures on Marriage and Family— A Microcosm of the Larger World

Families have been changing ever since they came into existence. However, we need to recognize that we live in highly stressful times with unprecedented technological change affecting every aspect of life. The sheer pace of change calls for stable and healthy families so that people have the necessary emotional strength to deal with them. Yet, when the need to rely on them is greatest, too often we find contemporary families are vulnerable, even fragile, because personal interactions between parents and between parents and children are weak, and fragmented as never before. Hence, special efforts must be made to learn, form, and maintain healthy relationships from within a stable and healthy family.

Families and individual members within a family are not isolated from each other, remote and unaffected by the society in which they live. One of the major reasons why problems arise is the failure to recognize the velocity of change in society as a whole, and how it affects relationships within the family. Some of these changes are comprehensible, some are puzzling, but all have a greater or lesser impact on us. If one were to look beyond the immediate and from a more historical perspective, it is possible to make sense of what otherwise seems to be random, oppressive and illogical events.

It must be recognized that families everywhere are strongly influenced by educational levels, industrialization, technological dominance, migration, restructuring of economies, change in global trade patterns and practices, impact of unemployment, migration, materialism, and massive changes with regard to attitudes, values, and lifestyles. These changes have, in new ways, built new walls of attitudes and lifestyles of individualism or

collective insulation, while simultaneously demolishing the barriers of distance that once separated people and hindered the flow of ideas between peoples of different cultures, bringing about considerable re-routing in learning curves all through life.

In contemporary times, change, by its very nature, is aimed at undermining the stability of marriage and family life. The very existence of the Family is sought to be swept out by many. Some even question the need for marriage and the utility of the family and marital commitment to the needs of children. While there is no specific data available on divorce, there is indication that marriage rates have declined over the years with an increase in divorce rates around the world, along with a simultaneous numerical leap in unwed pregnancies and cohabitation. The consequences of these trends on the health and well-being of couples themselves and of the children and the community cannot be underestimated. These trends, which are active around the world and gaining increasing velocity in some countries, with contagious effects on others, are highly detrimental to the fulfilment of human needs, especially those of children and marriage. They call for an extremely urgent strengthening of family life and family relationships for the well-being of future generations.

Insights from research in behavioral and social sciences have influenced popular concepts of socialization and their manifold effects on adults, adolescents, and children. The current term “globalization,” which has in many ways been imposed on some countries and in some ways has been unquestioningly adopted by younger generations, has led to profound differences, especially between developed and developing nations, the rich and the poor in each nation, and at micro levels, between parents and children and in our homes between our own present lifestyles and those of our elders.

Ervin Lazlo writes: “All societies in the world today are in a process of transformation. Technologies and institutions as well as values, beliefs and goals are changing.” (Ervin Lazlo, *et al* (1948) *Goals for Mankind*): Change, therefore, will be the pattern of our lives and to cope effectively with it, we will have to see it in a positive light and enable children to develop resilience in order to make choices and resist the processes that are negative and/or destructive. To ignore the reality of change will only sap our energies and block our attempts to understand it.

How Parental Attitudes Affect Children

It is also in the interest of parents and society to examine their personal beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes, because they are crucial in family life and affect spousal relationship, parent–child relationships, and the way in which children are raised. Psychologists have established that expectations have an important influence on the behavior of children. If children are expected to be bad, they will be. When children are constantly told they are naughty or bad and treated with impatience, they will not have a chance to learn and develop the human values that rightfully belong to them. They may grow up lacking self-confidence, self-esteem, and social skills, and be handicapped in their relationships with others. Human behavior is largely the result of a person’s will, a will that was shaped by learning from others and life’s experiences. Poor behavior is not, we believe, the result of any inborn evil, but usually reflects ignorance resulting from a lack of socialization and clear guidance. To expect a child to “behave” when he or she does not know what appropriate behavior might be, is to minimize the child’s voice. It is the task of the parents to assist and enable the child to speak, acquire good habits, and develop a positive character. The objective is best achieved when both parents point out the desirable from the unacceptable and encourage positive behavior in the child.

If parents believe that human beings are fundamentally good and capable of developing the higher qualities, such as kindness, they will teach their children constructive ways of dealing with life issues and expectations. Parents need to remember they are role models to show how these values can be translated into everyday living. When trusted and respected, a child will be valued as a friend and a gift.

Children need to be loved and cared for from conception to adulthood and after. Children need to enjoy warmth and enduring relationships with their parents. Where the relationship between the husband and wife is enduring, children grow up in the security of a home where values are not only taught but caught, and integrated adulthood can be expected to emerge. When parents bring to their marriage the ingredients of love, trust, and caring, they build into the relationship values that are lasting and enduring and can stand the test of time and change.

Secrets of a Healthy Family

The secrets of a healthy family are the ability of parents to listen to their children and work out with them answers to their questions and pay attention to their issues without belittling them or their experiences. Parents need to foster a positive environment in spite of change and challenges; the urgent need is to prevent problems from arising in the first place.

What Parents Can Do to Give Children a Voice

Parents must first be convinced of the innate value of the child, for it is this that makes all their efforts meaningful and worthwhile. Second, they need to improve their own frames of reference in order to become better examples. Third, there must be unity and love between parents as a married couple. Four, they must understand the developmental stages and goals of childhood.

Developmental Stages and Goals of a Child

Stage	GOAL
Infancy	Developing trust
Toddler	Developing independence
Pre-school age	Developing initiative
School age	Developing industry
Adolescence	Developing self-identity.

(Donna Ewy & Rodger Ewy, (1985). Preparation for Parenthood)

Each child will grow through each developmental stage at his or her own pace, regardless of what parents or siblings did at that age. Providing a nurturing environment for reasonable expectations tailored to the individual's temperament and capabilities, is usually the most effective method of helping children achieve these goals.

It needs to be noted that if there is marital disharmony, parents will find their energies diverted and sapped by the friction and will thus be unable to give their children the attention they deserve. Also, the children will be less receptive, seeing their parents' discord, with neither side willing to forgive or compromise.

What Parents Can Do to Empower Children's Voices

As the child's first teachers, the parents' goal is to draw out the very best that potentially exists in the child. What takes place in the home is the foundation of all future learning and achievement. Under the guidance of parents, children acquire their self-images and the fundamentals of good character, which enable them to make the best use of whatever intellectual and social gifts they have.

Education in its comprehensive understanding is only partly dependent on formal living. A child who is caring and courteous is an asset to humanity, even if he is not intellectually gifted, while one who is highly educated but behaves in an antisocial manner is a menace to himself/herself and others.

Parents are expected to nurture and educate the young mind and character, a delicate, time-consuming, and complex operation. In addition to what is absorbed by the impressionable mind, parents must also be concerned with how well the mind is organized, and how it expresses itself. The responsibility of parents is to serve as loving and wise instructors, pointing out relationships, correcting faulty perceptions, and providing reassurance.

(a) Establish trust

The bedrock of emotional security is laid during an infant's earliest days, when his cries are met with loving, patient attention. If there is a consistent pattern to daily life, with no prolonged periods of hunger, discomfort, or fatigue, the baby will develop a trusting view of the world, able to rely on the fact that food and comfort come along with reassuring regularity. Moreover, unselfish parental love plays an important part in the child's growth and development, as, even if physical nourishment is provided by parents without this fundamental stability, a child will be emotionally and even physically handicapped.

As the child advances in age, he needs to know that parental love will not be withdrawn, that parents can be relied upon. If the child is aware that parents are by his side, he will also realize that they always have his best interests at heart. When they point out a flaw in his behavior, he will understand that it must be corrected because the behavior itself is wrong, not because the parents are unkind or capricious. He will not view their

admonition as a rejection or condemnation of himself as a worthless person.

The process of building trust between parents and children starts early and continues through the years. It requires sincere effort from parents to see things from their child's point of view, not first their own, and to try and understand the child's own reasoning and motivation for acting in a particular way in a given situation. When parents patiently question and receive this information, they can correct faulty thinking. Children who do not have a fundamental trust in the love and concern of parents will not be able to grow up as well as those who live in assured, dependable families, nourished with a constant flow of love.

(b) Talk together

Listening intently to a child's perception and imagination can be an enchanting experience and it is exciting to watch the young mind develop as it acquires the ability to think clearly. A daily "talk time" in which the child can have his parents' undivided attention is indispensable—no career, no hobby, no demands, no household chore should interrupt this precious time of communication. All the cares of the day should be set aside to make this time "special."

Anxieties, fears, the puzzling behavior of other children, and questions about the universe and the child's place in it, can be dealt with in simple ways that are affectionate and caring. When the child is confiding something, patronizing and chastising should be replaced by being emotionally supportive and accepting. A mere shake of the head or a look sometimes helps the child realize that something went wrong—parents do not need to chastise, but can offer sympathy and encouragement, gently pointing out the way to do it right the next time. They need to reassure the child that there is always a tomorrow, there are always chances to improve.

"Talk-times" are some of the most delightful experiences of child rearing. Walking hand in hand or sitting side by side for a chat are moments that the child cherishes. Being a caring listener strengthens feelings of self-worth and gives a sense of being both cherished and valued. This will help give them the self-respect they need to treat others with respect.

(c) Bond with children

Parents always need to be patient, willing, and non-patronizing to their young children, always a friend, but also a parent. This is necessary so as not to dilute the parental role. Parents need to be parents first, friends second, and maintain the line of authority. Once the line of authority is blurred it is hard to re-establish it. This can happen, and single parents are especially susceptible. Children always need someone in charge of them, no matter how amicable that parent may be.

Being friends implies being comfortable with one another, being able to enjoy common ideas, thoughts, and activities together. Love in a family is assumed and axiomatic, but liking one another enough to seek out each other's company is the result of an accepting and warm environment. When parents themselves are fast friends, bonding with children and between siblings come more naturally.

(d) Encourage children to be independent

To encourage independence, parents need to know when to leave the child alone to explore, to find things out, and to play and interact with others. There are times when it is even wise to allow a child to make a few errors, as long as the mistakes are not life threatening or carry the risk of burning the house down!

Nearly every mistake is the result of not applying certain fundamental concepts. For example, consideration for others is a basic principle, as is kindness, safety, being careful—dozens and dozens of general principles that must be learned when growing up. Learning to behave rationally and responsibly is what maturing into independence is all about. In a sense, confident behavior is simply connecting the fundamental principles of conduct to the child's daily life.

When children make repeated mistakes, parents should take care not to angrily call attention to them but to explain the underlying logical concept behind the issue so that the mistakes are less likely to be repeated.

Starting with total dependency at birth and going on till eventual independence, the relaxation of parental control is gradual during the normal process of maturing, while the child's self-discipline and sense of inner direction grows correspondingly. In this process, responsibility is

transferred to the growing child, and the goal of raising an integrated, independent person becomes achievable.

(e) Exercise discipline with love and firmness

Discipline with love and firmness recognizes the individuality of the child as a person. This becomes necessary for any family or community to function optimally. Children are inexperienced and therefore need the guidance of adults who are mature, responsible, and integrated.

The basic and fundamental tasks of the family in its relationship building must be taught early. Family is the first school of education and parents the first teachers; they enable children to become aware that there are differences between right and wrong and kindness and unkindness. With the passage of time, the child becomes conscious of the larger surroundings and family members, and realizes that there are definite privileges and responsibilities. Discipline (an unheard word these days) assists the child in his socialization process, developing his self-respect as an integral part of the whole, and helps him learn to respect the rights of others, both within the family and in the larger social community. This responsible raising of children can minimize friction and conflict in the home, and help the child develop positive socializing skills.

Discipline therefore acknowledges the rights and responsibilities of both parents and children.

(f) Affirmation—Helps build confidence and self esteem

One of the assets parents can give their children is to help them develop a deep reservoir of self-esteem that will not only allow them to fulfil their potential, but will also carry them through the inevitable stresses of life.

Young people who have the assurance of self-esteem and self-reliance believe they have some control over their destinies and do have a voice. Unafraid to undertake new ventures, they feel quite optimistic and easily attract the friendship of others. They feel that as long as they make an effort, they can achieve stability in life. Other children who have the same natural intelligence but low self-esteem are less competent, unwilling to volunteer, abandon tasks at the first signs of difficulty, have few social skills to maintain friendships and frequently say “I can’t” or “I am not able to.” (Paul Chance. (1986). *Your Child’s Self-Esteem*).

The question is: How can we raise children who will have a voice and adults who will encourage children to express that voice?

There is no specific recipe—only the assurance that if children are enabled to develop healthy attitudes they begin to develop a positive self-image and self-confidence. Positive action takes many forms. Although not every child will receive top grades in academic subjects in school, he or she can still be made to feel successful. Talent is abundant, but children need to be given space, opportunity, and appreciation to express that talent and to have a say in what pertains to his or her life and future.

(g) Identifying with children: Seeing through their eyes and using language they can understand

The fragile and tender voices and nature of children call for protection. Their hearts are delicate, their feelings sensitive, and, although we may not be aware of it, their views on matters that affect them are perceptive.

The life of a child can be compared to a flower, the sensitivity of their feelings to clean water, while the acuteness of their vision reminds us of a strong microscope: the first will wither and fade away at the first sign of rough handling, the second will be clouded and polluted by the least amount of agitation, while the third will make them keen sighted and precise. (Ali-Akbar Firutan (1980) *Mothers, Fathers and Children; Practical Advice to Parents*). When we try to look at the world through the eyes of our children, we will become attuned to them, and instead of seeing things from our adult perspective, we will be able to work with them from their perceptions and points of view.

Through these experiences they will learn empathy—the ability to share in the emotional states of others. They will learn two essential components of positive socialization—to be considerate and to have no wish to harm others. They will learn to control their negative feelings, refrain from being overly critical, and practice forbearance. As parents, we can help children control themselves.

Parental Behavior

Emotional well-being

Family and home are not just places where a group of people meet or live; they have an ambience and spirit of their own, where certain

conditions must be present to create a general sense of well-being and emotional bonding.

(a) *Truthfulness*

Truthfulness is the base on which lasting and successful relationships are built. Lack of honesty and truthfulness corrode relationships and children should not be prevented from “saying it as it is.” They should also be listened to carefully. Silencing a child leads to dominance and fear and eventually he becomes entrapped in a web of lies, to the extent that it becomes a dominant feature of his character. Speaking the truth is giving a voice to the child, to speak and be heard.

(b) *Consistency*

It represents a fundamental harmony and integrity in conduct. It is a stepping stone to burning away the fog of confusion and uncertainty. It brings stability, defines boundaries, establishes expectations, and provides for the orderly dispensing of rewards.

(c) *Flexibility*

Flexibility is certainly not an uncompromising rigidity in family and/or social relationships. One can be inconsistent yet rigid. Rigidity implies taking a position irrespective of merits. Sometimes a child may be refused a reasonable request without thinking it through. Then the child refuses to relent even when a legitimate request is made of him.

When a very young child says something untrue, the most appropriate response may simply be to rephrase the whole story into the truth instead of scolding the child. Flexibility in thought and action calls for sensitivity, especially to young children who often have difficulty in distinguishing fantasy from fact.

(d) *Reverence*

Reverence is a mixture of love, respect, and courtesy. It should be shown to oneself, others, the whole of creation, and the Creator. Reverence is the cornerstone on which appreciative attitudes are built, and children need to develop this attitude at the earliest possible age.

Reverence is found in the value of human life. Any form of disregard or harm to human life manifests itself in antisocial behavior and goes hand in hand with contempt for human life.

(e) *Apologizing*

The fear of losing authority often does not allow parents to apologize when they make a mistake. This is unwise for several reasons. (Joyce and Vedral. 'I'm Sorry,' Parents Magazine 62)

When children hear their parents express regret, they learn to say sorry too. Knowing that parents also can make mistakes teaches children to be more self-accepting. If a child never hears apologies, he may think that apologizing is a sign of weakness. Parents can maintain their dignity and also show that being wrong is not shameful—a sincere apology is an honorable way to admit mistakes. When a parent says “I am sorry I hurt your feelings,” it shows that parents really care about how the child feels. Apologies should be made after anger has subsided and one is sincerely sorry. It then clears the air of troubled feelings and the incident can be laid to rest.

(f) *Laughter and humor*

A home without laughter is like a garden without flowers. We are all capable of enjoying this priceless gift of life and giving joy to others. A sense of humor needs to be developed. The best kind of humor is that which does not involve having fun at someone else's expense. Family humor should be free of racial, ethnic, and gender bias as well as abusive language. An Eastern saying goes: “Teasing and mockery are sharp scissors that can sever any relationship.” We should make sure that humor permeates family life so that the children join in and automatically acquire the love of laughter.

Growing in a Larger World and Exercising One's Voice

As children grow toward adulthood, their attention turns to the larger world. They are interested in issues that relate to life beyond the intimacy of the family home: planning for a career, raising unprejudiced children, and so on. This century sees the outline of the dynamic societies in which our children will spend most of their lives. We have to prepare them to be competent and confident in the years that lie ahead despite the rapidity of change and the onslaught of technology.

The way family members treat each other has a great influence on whether the children will grow up believing in the equality of men and women. Does the father listen to the mother with respect? Are the major decisions of the family made jointly? Does the mother refuse to be spoken to rudely by anyone in the family? Are the daughters challenged intellectually and encouraged to plan their careers with the same seriousness as the sons? If sons are not trained to believe in the equality of men and women, they may have a difficult time with women in authority at work, as well as a problem finding and keeping a wife who will be happy in a subservient role. If daughters are not made to feel equally capable of achieving to the best of their abilities, they may remain arrested in their development, and the larger world will be deprived of their unique contributions.

The Role of the State in Supporting Healthy Marriages, Strengthening the Two-Parent Family and Protecting Children

“Family” is pivotal to the past, present, and future of humanity. Family affects and is affected by trends, changes, and transformations. The International Year of the Family (IYF) Occasional Paper says: “The relative strength of a nation or society depends largely on the strength of its families. What occurs in families affects the whole of society, and vice versa. There is a complicated relationship between the two.” The article titled “Future of Children” (Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University and The Brooklyn Institute Vol. 15, No 2) has this to say: “It would be a mistake for policy makers to focus on marriage to the exclusion of other strategies. Among such strategies, alleviating poverty, improving parent–child bonds and reducing teenage childbearing and unintended pregnancies are especially promising. Efforts to reduce out-of-wedlock births, teenage pregnancy in particular, are an essential part of a marriage and should not be a proxy for cutting programs for single parents. Programs to encourage fathers’ involvement – both monetary and emotional – must be continued. A strong child support system and a fair court system that encourages joint involvement of separating parents must be continued and improved. All these programs are crucial to the overall mission to increase the number of healthy marriages and improve the overall wellbeing of children.”