



The Privilege of Parenting

Some researchers have found that when people have children their level of happiness drops. That is something of a surprise since we generally see the arrival of a baby as a "blessed event." Yet maybe it should not surprise us that all the demands of caring for children can also wear people out. One scholar has suggested that, while happiness may drop when a child is born, the meaning we get from life may increase. Even with all the demands associated with having children, they can make life more meaningful. Rather than live merely for ourselves, we begin to live for something that will last longer than we will. It is probably good for prospective parents to be prepared for the demands of parenting: lack of sleep, inconvenience, and frustration. It is also good for prospective parents to be prepared for the joy, learning, and love that come with having a child.

A wise parent will get information and help in order to be more effective. Your mother or a good friend who has had children may be able to help you in the first days of adjustment to a baby. Since the demands on a mother's body can cause exhaustion or depression, it is wise to counsel with your doctor as you make the adjustment to motherhood. Also, there are good books that can be helpful. (See a list of books at the end of this unit.) The study of parenting materials (such as these units) can help you be more effective.

Parenting is education on being a human. Like any education, parenting can be difficult, even confusing, at times. But parenting teaches the parent priceless lessons about understanding other people, the miracle of development, patience, service, learning, and love.

Parenting is an opportunity to draw people together. Involve other family members in loving and caring for your child. If you have other children, you can invite them to hold or feed the baby. Relatives can provide you with support and help. You may need to call on friends and family occasionally to care for the baby while you get a break.

Fathers can make a vital contribution to children's development. They should be involved in caring for the child, in supporting the mother, and in learning about child development. When there are two caring parents involved in a child's life, the child will learn important lessons from each parent.

Parenting is never finished. Even when our children are adults, they still need our listening, our counsel, and, most of all, our encouragement. Our children will make mistakes but, like us, they can learn from them and become better.

Applications:

Make a list of the people in your life who can teach you and support you during the vital transition to parenthood. In the weeks before birth, talk with them about both your fears and your excitement. Invite them to be a part of the journey. Each may help in a different way. One may call and encourage you. Another may make baby clothes or blankets. Another may be glad to care for the baby occasionally so that you can get out and exercise.

Keep a journal. Record the events as well as the feelings as your baby grows inside of you and then in the months and years beyond. Your journal might be just a few words about what the baby did or what you felt or it might be sketches you make or it might be a longer narrative. It might be notes on a calendar. In whatever way you keep a journal, it can be a reminder to you of struggles, growth, and joys in the process of parenting.

Ask people you know and admire about their experiences with parenting. What have they learned? What do they most cherish? What was most difficult? How did they solve problems?

There are excellent books that can help parents know how to be effective with their children.

Dr. Spock's Baby and Child Care by Benjamin Spock and Michael Rothenberg is like an encyclopedia for dealing with the needs of growing children from hugging to feeding.

To Listen to a Child by T. Berry Brazelton helps parents understand and deal with the normal problems of growing up.

What to Expect the First Year by Arlene Eisenberg, Heidi E. Murkoff, and Sandee E. Hathaway is another encyclopedic work that provides a month-by-month guide to care for a child during that vital first year.

Between Parent and Child by Haim Ginott is the classic book on dealing with children once they get beyond babyhood. He provides sound advice on being understanding while setting limits.

You can also search the web for resources to help. Some advice you will get is wise; some will be foolish. You can identify good advice because it is both practical and compassionate - it helps you deal with real problems while it shows caring and understanding for humans - both children and adults.

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