Building Family Values in Children

What are the values that your family holds? Taking time to think and talk about them is a way for parents to convey them to their children. This communication also engenders a sense of belonging to the group, as all the members work toward the same goals.

An effective way to work on this would be the following process:

- The parents talk between themselves about what is important to them.
- The parents tell their children about these values.
- The entire family discusses the values so that everyone understands them.
- The parents guide all family members to make sure that actions match the stated values.

Once the parents have decided that this is an approach they want to take, they tell their children and have a family discussion about it, possibly at the dinner table. They help the children to understand what the benefits are when all members of the family do this.

To enforce the importance of this statement, they could: have a set dinner time, ask for children's suggestions in planning the meal, find ways for children to help with meal preparation, and be sure to include all family members in table discussions.

If they put their efforts toward making this an enjoyable time for family members to share each other's company and gather family solidarity from it, then the children will continue to value the time together.

The family mission statement can cover a wide diversity of values to be decided, first by the parents and then by all members. Consider any of these topics for inclusion in yours:

- the way money will be saved and spent
- the importance of education
- the amount of family time you will spend together
- the importance of activities outside the home and school
- the responsibilities each member of the family will have toward maintaining the household

Following are some guiding points that may help you toward creating your family's mission statement:

- Both parents need to agree before bringing the points to the children.
- It is critical that the children see both parents present a united perspective. Children will recognize when there is weakness coming from one of the parents or discord between them.
- The family is not a democracy.
- Parents have the power, the experience, and the wisdom. The family is not a structure of one person/one vote. Your children are not consultants; they do not have the ability to see the big picture.
- Express your statements by saying what you want -- not what you don't want.
- Make your statements in positive terms. Instead of saying, "We don't call each other names," say, "We call people by their given names." Instead of saying, "We don't hit or kick each other," say, "We keep our hands, feet, and objects to ourselves."
- Explain your values by giving lots of examples to support each statement.

The more examples you can give to support your statements, the easier it will be for the children -- especially the younger ones -- to understand what you are talking about. If part of your mission statement is, "Education is important in our family," your examples might include these supporting statements:

- We cooperate with the teachers at school.
- We do all our homework.
- We ask for help when we need it.
- We attend school events such as the science fair, book fair, and the school play.
- Parents attend at least two PTA meetings a year.
- We do homework before we play.
- We limit television and video watching to weekends, with a maximum of two hours every weekend.
- We go to the library every week to check out books.
- We save 20% of all money gifts for college

Keep in mind that the earlier these values are discussed and established within the family, the easier they will be able to follow as children grow into their teenage years.