

# Making Children Feel Loved

*The supreme happiness in life is the conviction that we are loved.*

—Victor Hugo



certainly you care about your children. That's why you're reading this. And, like most parents, you probably make many sacrifices to feed, clothe, and educate your children. You may brag about them to anyone who will listen. Perhaps you even carry their pictures around to show off to your friends.

Yes, with few exceptions, all parents love their children.

Yet not all children feel loved. Even when their parents love them, some children think that no matter what they do, they're not wanted. Others learn that their parents care about them only when they behave in certain ways.

Clearly, being loved is not the same as feeling loved. It isn't enough to know you love your children. You have to be sure they know it, too. You have to show them you love them just the way they are, just because they are.

Loving your children, then, is largely a matter of getting the message across.

## Hidden messages

With children, it's often the little things that count. You may have scrimped and saved to buy a bigger and better home. But young children don't know that such acts express your love for them.

Instead, simple everyday events tell young children whether or not you value them. Your presence, a smile, a gentle touch, and a kind word spell "I love you" to a child.

In the same way, day-to-day happenings can tell children they are not valued very highly. Unintentionally, your words and actions can convey to children that you don't care.



Think about how some of the things you say and do might look from a child's point of view:

*Do you . . .*

*. . . tend to feed, clothe, and bathe your baby hurriedly, never taking advantage of this time to touch, talk, and play with her?*

*. . . show your affection for your child only when he does something that pleases you?*

If you're always in a hurry, your children may be learning not that you are busy, but that they are not important. If you express your love only under certain conditions, your children may be learning that you love them if they obey or if they don't wet the bed or if they don't make any mistakes. And if children receive many such messages, they may begin to think that you're not very glad to have them.

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## H E L P I N G • C H I L D R E N • G R O W

### Successful signals



Children who feel unloved act very differently from those who feel loved. They spend lots of time trying to reassure themselves and other people of their worth. They are cautious about trying new things, for failure hurts them deeply.

Children who know they are loved, on the other hand, don't have to waste time proving their worth. They aren't afraid to try out their wings. They know that even if they fall, they can still count on your love and respect.

To be sure your children feel secure about your love for them:

- Look at what your words and actions may be telling your children about themselves.
- Find ways to show your children that, no matter what, you love them.

This doesn't mean that if you ever get angry or frustrated with your children they are ruined forever. Children don't need perfect parents. Ordinary people will do. If the overall climate you create is one of love and respect, your children will learn they are valued.

*just the way they are,  
just because they are,  
no ifs, ands, or buts.*

### Love letters



Few things will be more important in deciding your children's future than their sense of self-worth. How they feel about themselves will affect who they choose as friends, how they get along with others, and how well they make use of their abilities; in other words, all aspects of their lives. The strategies described below can strengthen your children's self-worth by letting them know you love and value them.

**Pay attention to your children.** Take time to talk to them, listen to them, and show interest in their activities. Try to find times when you aren't hurried or tense and can focus just on them.

**Express your affection often through physical contact.** With babies, this means holding and cuddling. As children get older, you can offer hugs, kisses, caresses, an arm over the shoulder, or a pat on the back. Sometimes the right words are hard to find, but a gentle hug says it all.

**Treat your children with the same respect you show adults.** Too often we reserve one set of manners for adults and another for children. We may embarrass our children by scolding or criticizing them in front of others. Or we may get so involved in a conversation we forget their presence. Children are no less sensitive than adults and deserve the same kind of respect.

**Tell your children from time to time they are appreciated.** Don't wait until they get good grades, or limit your praise to their good looks or manners. Let them know you enjoy them and think they are great all the time.

**Respond to your children with patience and understanding.** When children spill their milk for the third time in a row, or hit their siblings over the head with a toy shovel, it's easy to treat them as criminals. Try, though, to see your child as someone who needs your help in controlling his or her body and emotions.

**Respect children's feelings and abilities.** Because of their size, we sometimes forget that children are people, too. They have a right to privacy and to feelings of their own. We may have to remind ourselves not to carry children when they can get there on their own steam or to speak for them when they can do this for themselves.

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