

Jan's Seven Must-Do's for Expressing Your Love for Your Children

I've listed these in order of importance based on my experience with my kids as well what I've heard from their friends.

1 Spend TIME with your kids.

Notice this is number ONE on my list? Ask any adult what this means to them and I'm sure you'll learn that it's important to everyone. Is that an eye opener or what?

The other options are just as important too, but it'll be tough to do anything else on this list if you don't spend time with them, don't you think? And it's not like you have to do anything wild and crazy. I mean, I understand that you probably work all day and are tired when you get home. But there are some simple things like:

- Have meals together at the kitchen/dining table.
- Let them sit with you in the kitchen while you're fixing dinner.
- Let them watch you do the laundry; separating the colors, loading the machine and pouring in the soap are things that can be quite fascinating to a child.

These few activities give them time to say whatever's on their mind, and with my toddlers, this was a great time to slowly let them learn how to do some of these tasks themselves.

I know, it's hard to believe that you can show and tell your kids how much you love them every minute of every day simply by spending TIME with them isn't it?

(Refer to page 97 in the book to see a longer list of suggestions. I'm sure you'll find a few things that will work for you and your family.)



2 Show AFFECTION to your kids.

This means HUGS and kisses and holding hands. Hugs give everyone a sense of security that can never be taken away. It's the best way to let your children know that you love them and are there for them even when times are tough; kids need to know this.

There are quite a few opportunities in a day when you can make that physical connection with them:

- Pick your baby/child up and wrap your arms around her when she falls down.
- Hold your baby's hand during those first few steps and keep on doing it every time you walk together.
- Give him a hug when you see the awful look of disappointment on his face when he doesn't get an "A" on that report (for which she worked so hard).
- Whenever you and your kids are walking together, hold hands or wrap your arms around each other's waists.
- Make sure your kids hold hands with each other, too. Hey, you're all part of the same family!
- Kiss the "owie" on his knee while holding his hand.

If you start the "hug habit" when your babies are newborns, it'll be so easy and so natural to continue it with them throughout their toddling years, their adolescent years, their teenage years (even when many kids think they're "too cool" to be seen with Mom), all the way up to adulthood.

3 LISTEN to your kids.

God gave you two ears and one mouth for a reason. Even if they barely know two words and the rest is just garble, be quiet and listen. Kids at every age truly believe they're saying something important. At least it's important to them. I know weird, but it's true. So, even if you don't understand a word they're saying...



- Look at them when they talk, or attempt to talk. Your kids are watching your facial expressions, that's how they know you are listening.
- Respond to them when they talk...one word or sound works: "Hmmm," "yes," "no," "that's interesting," is probably all you need with babies and toddlers.
- Adolescents and teens usually only want a "sounding board," so one word responses usually suffice. However, and only when asked, you've got to be prepared to offer your opinions and advice.
- So listen to your kids when they tell you about that fascinating beetle they found on the way home from school.
- And listen while your son or daughter talks and cries about the "owie" in their heart because they just got their feelings hurt by a friend.
- More importantly, listen to them when they talk about their friends, other kids or teachers. This is what gives you a clue as to what's going on in their lives, how they feel about it and how it affects their world outside your home.

This is such an important part of raising kids that I've addressed it a few times: Check out the section about when you might be able to do this on page 44, and then review my "3-Second Rule" on page 100 for more help.

4 Set and enforce BOUNDARIES and RULES.

I know this sounds kind of weird, but really, this shows that you care about your kids' behavior, health, and welfare. Also, you are teaching them how they will be expected to act when they are teenagers and eventually grownups. So to begin,

- Don't ever assume your kids know what you mean or expect of them. You'll always need to explain to them, or show them, exactly what you expect them to do and how to do it, especially if they look at you like you have four heads. (This is kind of like dealing with grownups too, right?)
- Yes, you will have to tell them a thousand or a million times! Get over it!



- Set and enforce bedtimes because that leads to enforcing curfews. Kids need sleep and so do you so you all can function the next day. C'mon, you must know that this becomes a safety issue too, right?

Surely you don't want your 14-year-old daughter arguing about staying out till 11 pm on a school night, do you? (I mean, the mall is closed so where would she want to go at that hour anyway?) Not to mention the fight it'll take to wake her up at the crack of dawn the next morning.

- Teach your little ones to sit on chairs at the dinner table; standing up and screaming shouldn't be acceptable in any situation. It's annoying and dangerous if they fall. Besides, you don't want your kids to be "those kids" who are climbing on furniture in public or at a friend's house when they're 15, do you?
- Assign them age-appropriate household chores as soon as they can walk. That might be putting their toys in a toy box every night, putting things in the trash can, or helping you to push the buttons to start the washing machine or the dishwasher. As they get older you can show them how to sort laundry and load the dishwasher.
- Remind them as to when these things need to be done; put toys away every night before bedtime, trash to be put in can immediately, laundry is done on Wednesdays, dishes immediately after dinner, etc.
- PRAISE them when they help even if they do something a little bit wrong. I admit housework sucks. But that's why you need to start your kids on some of this stuff at a really early age while they still think it's fun to "help Mom." Your praise is what's going to keep them doing these things as they grow up because this teaches them to take pride in their own good work.

The other bonus is that your kids will know what it means to pick up after themselves, make their bed, do their own laundry and wash their own dishes when they finally decide to move out and live on their own. Pretty clever don't you think?

- If you don't like cursing in your household, tell them which words are acceptable to use or not use. I'm sure you can imagine how this one can bite you in the butt when they get to school.



5 Practice What You PREACH,

Aka, set a good example of good behavior.

The easiest way to enforce your rules and boundaries (*mentioned on page 52 in the book*) is for you to follow the same exact rules. I think we all know that our kids are little parrots because YouTube is full of funny kid videos. So you know where they learn this stuff, right? Set them up for good behavior and therefore success down the road by watching your own behavior.

6 TELL your kids, as often as you possibly can, how much you love them.

As Ken Blanchard always says, "*Keep your 'I love yous up to date!*" This is a good plan for everyone in your life! Here are some opportunities where you can do that:

- Each time you part ways for the day, (daycare, school, work, drugstore runs) exchange hugs and "I love yous. "
- Greet each other every day when you wake up with a "Good morning, sweetheart/honey (or whatever rolls off your tongue), I love you so much!"
- Each night when you go to bed, tuck your babies in with a hug and a kiss and an "I love you. "
- Say "I love you" each time you finish a phone call with them. (I still do that with both my grown kids even though my son still doesn't say it back: I'm still the mom so it's my "job.")
- Or say it just because you feel it any time of the day or night.



7 Use Positive Reinforcement and PRAISE.

Remember those boundaries and rules in Must Do #4? When your children are still toddlers they are just learning so most things they attempt to help you with are going to be, shall I say, less than perfect? Regardless, you need to encourage them with some praise because if you don't, asking for their help will be a nightmare. So,

- When they do help even when the outcome is less than perfect, thank them for their help.
- When they help and it's all good, thank them and praise them for a job well done.
- Tell your kids that you're proud of them on a regular basis.
- Tell them that they're great kids and you really enjoy being with them.

Well, what do you think? Did you come up with a few ideas of your own? (This might be a good page to mark with a sticky note to which you can add your ideas.)

My Personal Conclusions

I think if you start when your babies are born this type of behavior will just become your new "normal" thus making your life and your household whole lot happier. Keep in mind that children have their values and most beliefs imprinted on their spongy, immature little minds usually by the time they're seven years old. Their behavior is a direct reflection of what they hear, see and imitate up until that point.

http://changingminds.org/explanations/values/values_development.htm

So you should,

- Continue with these Seven Must Do's through their terrible two's (which is probably one of the most trying times of your life);
- Through their adolescence;
- On through their teen years (when they say they don't need it, but this is when they really need it the most);



- All the way through to their young adult years;
- And then, it might end with your last breath.

I hope this point of view and these suggestions make you stop and take a look at your own behaviors as a parent, as well as your children's. Remember, it all starts at home. Everyone and everyone's situation is different, so take what works for you and ditch the rest. I promise I won't be offended...just honored that you took the time to hear other ideas for the sake of your family. With some luck and a prayer this will make a difference in your life and the lives of your children.

Sincerely,

Jan

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