

Bringing Back the Wonder

By Patricia J. Davis

Like other young children, my two sons, John and Joshua, ask questions: "What is abortion? What is homosexuality? What is pornography? Why do terrorists hate us?"

Children today are exposed to many situations that raise questions and can lead to anxiety. Deteriorating social trends, news from radio and television, and information received from friends prompt them to ask questions. They lose their childhood innocence far too quickly.

Slowing the Pace

The rapid pace of change in our society, partly due to technology and globalization, often adversely affects our children. What can parents do? We can begin by slowing down the pace.

Living in this fast-paced world can be difficult for children. They need free time. Time to enjoy being kids. Some experts in child psychology believe that depression and Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) in children is related to stress from their hectic routines. Quiet time can be a blessing for many children. It allows room for dreaming, imagination, and creativity.

In *The Strong Family* (Zondervan, 1994), Charles Swindoll writes, "Scripture clearly states, 'There is an appointed time for everything' (Ecclesiastes 3:1, NASB). How about time to be a child? How about time to grow up slowly, carefully, yes, even protected, and dare I add, a little naïve? How about time to "speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child' (1 Corinthians 13:11, NASB)?"



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Exercising Parental Responsibility

In the parent-child relationship, the parent is the one in authority. Don't give that authority away. Children feel safe and secure when a loving adult takes charge.

Writing in *Parents* magazine, Diana Baumrind of the University of California at Berkeley explains that "authoritative parents (parents who set firm limits but were warm, rational and receptive) were the most likely to have self-reliant, self-controlled, and contented children."

Parents can undermine their authority by giving in too easily. Drs. Henry Cloud and John Townsend, authors of *Boundaries with Kids* (Zondervan, 2002) provide this example: "A child may be adopting reactive behavior such as having tantrums. The smiling, happy child turns into a screaming maniac when you, for example, say no to his desire." Drs. Cloud and Townsend explain, "A tantrum doesn't solve anything. The child needs to use these feelings to motivate him to action, to address the issue at hand. He should think about his responses and choose the best one available. From a loving, firm position, you can help your child mature his reactive (tantrum) boundaries into love and reality-based proactive [responsibility, problem-solving] boundaries." By exercising parental authority, we help our children take ownership of their behavior and feelings.



Teaching Christian Values

In today's world, young children often acquire sophisticated tastes and desires. Excessive imagery assaults them constantly, pushing them to focus on clothes, personal appearance, games, toys, and so on. Our media-driven culture makes it difficult to direct children toward the spiritual. If parents fail to teach spiritual values to their children, the world will supply them with its values.



of Childhood

Deuteronomy 6:6, 7 states, "These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up."

Charles Swindoll says, "We need to think of the home as a training place, not a showplace. The home is a laboratory where experiments are tried out on a daily basis." Look for and take the time to use teachable moments. Talk about commonplace things as Jesus did with his disciples. Parents also teach by their lifestyle. God has promised to be faithful to us despite the culture around us.

Supervising Entertainment

The Internet, violent computer games, explicit sex, and violence in film and television—these powerful forces can corrupt our children and keep them from maintaining a healthy sense of innocence. A Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation study conducted in 2001 revealed that 68 percent of television shows include sexual content, an increase from 56 percent in 1999.

The same foundation conducted a nationwide review of the media habits of children aged two through 18. It revealed children spend large quantities of time alone in front of a TV or computer screen, and nearly one-fourth of school age children watch television more than five hours a day.

Do we allow our children to view anything they choose? Some years ago our family decided to discard our television set. We sold it for \$25 and went to dinner on the proceeds. We have not regretted our decision. My husband and I spend more time now in conversation with our children.

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Choosing Wholesome Activities

According to Christian authors Dave and Claudia Arp, many children watch television because they are bored. They recommend replacing television with productive and intriguing activities that help recapture the imagination of children and improve family time. Consider activities such as board games, family projects, outdoor activities, family dinners, and reading for pleasure.

Young children derive pleasure from simple things. They enjoy stories, plays, puppet shows, family games—the list is long. Enhance your child's experience by including mom and dad in these activities.

Visits to the library can be rewarding for young children, as long as parents monitor the activity. Author Sharon Sheppard writes, "Many libraries allow kids to surf the Internet without any restrictions. Kids can stumble across pornography unintentionally—once it is viewed, the scenes may never be erased from their minds."

Where appropriate, help your children choose the books they read. You may decide that some of the more popular books among young readers today are not suitable for your children. Lindy Beam, youth culture analyst for Focus on the Family, writes, "In a culture with an obvious trend toward witchcraft and New Age thinking, we need to consider the effects these ideas may have on young, impressionable minds."

The days of childhood pass all too quickly. My husband may say to our young son, "Stop acting like a child!" Our son responds, "But, Daddy, I am a child." At that they both laugh. By being patient when our children behave in an exuberant and noisy manner, we will often rediscover the wonder of childhood, too.

As parents, it is our duty and privilege to guide and guard our little ones through life. We can depend on the promise given to us in Proverbs 22:6: "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it." We need wisdom to deal honestly and helpfully with their questions. Let's appreciate and enjoy this wonderful—and all too brief—time in their lives. ■

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