

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

### On Effective Relationships

One of the chief jobs of parents and teachers alike is to guide the children who enter their world so that each child will be able to function effectively in that world. By providing good examples for the child to follow and by setting appropriate limits when necessary the adults in a child's life help that child to become effective in relating to his/her cultural environment and to the people in it. For each child, learning how to behave appropriately in all sorts of different social and cultural situations is as important to a successful and healthy life as are reading and writing. Imparting these skills is no easy task and all the good modelling, love and affection have to be tempered with discipline and limit setting.

Discipline and limit setting are contentious areas of the parenting process. When is being strict too strict, or when does a child's exploration and creativity become excessive? What is required if discipline is to be effective, providing a learning experience rather than restriction or punishment?

The following points may be helpful in pondering the above questions.

Effective discipline requires knowledge and working understanding of the developmental needs of the child. A child in the first phase of development (birth to six years) requires a different approach than does one in the second phase (six to twelve years). Showing, role playing and repeated practice are effective at the former age. Words, language and stories with morals are often better saved for the latter stage of development. In either case, the approach one takes must needs be tempered by how each child learns. One person may 'get the message' in one or two lessons; another may require more time to absorb the lesson or to make the desirable behaviour a habit. Needless to say, consistency and follow through on the part of the adult are necessary at all stages of development.

Discipline becomes more effective when the adult recognizes that his/her need for the child to behave is shaped and influenced, in large part, by the his/her own need for orderly and responsive reactions on the part of the child. By **showing** a child how to behave in a particular situation or by **limiting** (i.e. stopping without telling or teaching) an inappropriate behaviour, the adult wins as much as the child. **Embarrassment** and **anger** on the adult's part are avoided and the child is guided towards a more suitable approach to the particular situation. A recognition that it is in the adult's as much as the child's interest fosters a 'win-win' situation that is mutually beneficial to both parties.

A working understanding of the approach one takes in re-directing misbehaviour is also a useful tool in the disciplinarian's arsenal. This is rarely, if ever, the 'ten steps' or the 'guaranteed formula' of magazine and television articles and advertisements. Knowledge of the child and of one's self are the only meaningful guides in formulating an approach that will work best when showing a child how to relate effectively to peers and culture. The same holds true when limits must be set as a means of guiding that child towards suitable responses to the inevitable, stressful and frustrating situations in his/her growing life.