

# Rearing a happy child

As parents we want our children to be happy and to grow to be well adjusted. We want to give them the best possible opportunities. We cannot guarantee that our children will be happy, but they have certain basic needs and dreams that we should try to fulfil.

Our children did not ask to be born. They are a gift to this world, and we have to treat this special person with love, care and due responsibility. We must realise that children are not all alike, and that each is an individual with his or her own special personality and needs. However, every person has the same basic needs that require attention. These needs include comfort, security, food, activity, warmth and proper sleep.

Being a good parent is one of the hardest and most challenging jobs in the world, and most parents do a wonderful job in raising children. Some important basic needs of children follow.

## Children need love

Children are not 'spoiled' by too much love, but rather by too little. The little 'brat' is usually the child who is neglected in some way and is seeking attention.

Children have 'antennae'—they can sense feelings towards them. The child who is loved knows it and develops into a contented, mature adult.

Love has to be unconditional—no strings attached. Children have to receive genuine love, for their own sake—not because they are pretty or talented or have great personalities. No matter who they are, or what they look like, or how they perform at school or sport, they all need encouragement and praise so that they have a healthy self-esteem.

Love is not being possessive and clinging to children with smothering affection or showering gifts on them. Love is common sense.

Love is to a child what sunlight is to a flower.

## Children need security

A feeling of security is vital to children. It comes not only from being loved but also from growing up in a secure home that is free from fighting parents, child abuse, over-interference from brothers and sisters and the problems of drugs (such as alcohol abuse). A warm bed, sufficient food and clothing are all part of the feeling of security.

## Children need play

Children need to be active and creative; they need to be given the opportunity to express themselves freely. 'Make-believe' play is important, so that they can work through their fantasies and frustrations.

Some rules for healthy and happy play are:

- Play with parents.
- Play in a supervised playground.
- Have playmates.
- Imitate the jobs of parents/other adults.
- Play with sand and water (a sandpit is great).

## Children need discipline

Children need the security of firm, loving discipline. They need to be protected from dangerous toys, games and situations. We must draw the line between wholesome freedom and allowing them to do as they like. It is important for children to learn early that there are certain limits in behaviour. They must learn to respect their own and other people's possessions.

Be consistent with your discipline. Never make threats that you cannot or will not carry out. Taking away certain privileges for a while (rather than physical punishment) when children are naughty seems to work well.

## Children need honesty

It is important to be honest with children. They learn to resent incorrect and illogical decisions and comments from their parents. This means being honest when explaining things that hurt, such as an injection or a visit to the dentist. We must also be fair in our comments about others, including their race and religion.

### Remember

- Parents are heroes and role models for their children. Don't let your children down.
- Parents are the best teachers.
- At times parents need the wisdom of Solomon.