

9-2018

Successful Parenting Begins with Love

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Recommended Citation

Baltazar, Alina, "Successful Parenting Begins with Love" (2018). *Lake Union Herald*. 809.
<https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/luh-pubs/809>

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Successful Parenting Begins with Love

Above all other denominations, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been uniquely blessed with the prophetic voice of Ellen White — faithful wife, loving mother and fervent missionary.



▲ Silvia Bacchiocchi and Alina M. Baltazar

Many of us may think of Ellen White as being stern and strict, but she begins her instructions on parenting by encouraging parents to first love their children.

In a recent book, a wise author advises parents that the key to binding their children’s hearts is to “connect before they direct.”¹ This is the same principle that Ellen White advocates: “Parents, let your children see that you love them and will do all in your power to make them happy. If you do so, your necessary restrictions will have far greater weight in their young minds” (AH, 193).² This can be easily done with a smile, hug, or warm words of gratitude or encouragement. Connection (love) before direction (discipline) shows our children that our relationship with them matters more to us than their actions. If we direct without love, we will likely need to resort to bribes or threats to achieve the desired behavior, and our children’s compliance will be fleeting. But when our first priority is to woo our children into a loving relationship, they will more naturally want to comply with our direction and eventually make it part of their habitual character. This practice is especially helpful during the teen years.

Connection and love bloom easiest when there is sunshine in the home, warm smiles, courteous ways and loving words. God intended that “home should be a little heaven upon earth, a place where the affections are cultivated instead of being studiously repressed. Our happiness depends upon this cultivation of love, sympathy, and true courtesy to one another” (AH, 15). Often the tender attentions and encouragements of

the early years disappear by the time our little ones reach two or three years and start getting into mischief. Yet the older our children are, the more they need our smiles and patient tones.

Today more than ever, children are tempted at every turn; if parents are not available to engage them lovingly and encouragingly, their affections will lean on the ubiquitous presence of their peers, technology, or other influences (such as alcohol, drugs, and sexual immorality) that will likely prove disastrous. The only solution is to “kindly instruct them and bind them to your hearts. It is a critical time for children. Influences will be thrown around them to wean them from you which you must counteract. Teach them to make you their confidant. Let them whisper in your ear their trials and joys” (AH, 191). And when they open their hearts to us, sharing their temptations and mourning their failures, let us be *quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to get angry* (James 1:19). Instead of reproach, let us show Christ’s compassion, loving encouragement and total forgiveness. ■

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1. Gordon Neufeld and Gabor Mate, *Hold On to Your Kids: Why Parents Need to Matter More Than Peers* (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 2005).
 2. Ellen G. White, *Adventist Home* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing, 1952).