



STRENGTHENING FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

LOOKING AHEAD

After completing this chapter, you will be able to

- Define family.
- Recognize the significance of parenting, as well as realize that there is a lack of formal required training.
- Make thoughtful decisions about parenting and preparation.
- Describe areas in which education is beneficial.
- Discuss parenting responsibilities.
- Define discipline, explain three styles, and give reasons that democratic discipline is recommended.
- Describe positive parenting behaviors.
- Discuss grandparenting and the benefits of its many roles.
- Understand ways to help a child cope with parents' divorce.

When “I–other” relationships work, then families work. When families work, societies work; when societies work, nations work; when nations work, nature works; and when nature works, the universe works.

—Thomas and Patrick Malone

Take a moment and reflect on the momentous influences a family has on a person's life. Your family gave you a name, a geographic home, and a societal position, and most important, family members contributed to your self-concept, learned attitudes, values, behaviors, and personality. The family, for most people, is the greatest determining factor in the quality of an individual's life. In the field of sociology, family is called a **primary group**, one that is small, intimate, and enduring.

Diversity is the best descriptor of families today. This chapter focuses on one of a family's most critical functions, that of raising children. A variety of family types will be discussed with emphasis on the importance that families play. The strengths of diverse families will be evident, and recommendations for building even stronger families will be given.

Exploring Families

What is a family? Responses from college sociology students range from the all-encompassing “a group of people who love each other” to the traditional, biological definition of “a mother, father, and child(ren).” According to the 2000 census, only 24.1 percent of households fit the traditional definition (Fields and Casper, 2000). Check your own idea of family by completing the “Family Picture” in Reflections and Applications. Sociologists have long agreed that a **family** is a relatively small domestic group of kin (related by biology, marriage, or adoption) that functions as a cooperative unit. The concept of family among professionals has broadened to include other groups in a committed relationship. Families are expected to provide financial support, affection, companionship, and the important task of **socialization**, transmitting the culture from one generation to another.

Quality of family life is worthy of attention. Even though children can overcome family patterns, they are better off not having to do so. When one considers the tremendous influence a family has on self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-fulfilling prophecies, personality development, happiness, emotionality, values, goal achievement, and interpersonal communication, there is no doubt that a person’s life can be positively or negatively affected by his or her family situation. Family members respect and allow fulfillment of one another’s needs and rights; support the mental, emotional, and spiritual growth of each individual; and allow and encourage personal growth. Within such families, the following occurs.

- Individuals are treated with dignity and perceived as equally deserving of respect.
- Personal freedoms are upheld; boundaries are maintained.
- Problems are acknowledged and resolved.
- Flexibility is evident.
- Love and affection are present.
- Communication is open and nonjudgmental.
- Mistakes are forgiven and viewed as learning tools.

Even if this does not sound like your family of origin, know that individuals are not destined to suffer permanent, adverse effects from family backgrounds. One benefit of achieving the objectives of this book is that you will be more aware of the skills necessary to develop a strong family.

Parenting in a Positive Way

“The biggest responsibility in the world.” “The hardest job you could imagine.” “Stressful, joyful, and challenging . . . I would not trade it for the world.” These are a few of the responses I have received to the question “What is parenting?” A consensus of opinion is that parenting is a difficult task. A few erroneously believe that the hardest part is giving birth. After that, they think that raising a child will just come naturally. “I know what to do. I was a kid once,” said a



Figure 13-1

young parent. You may be able to “parent”; however, positive parenting does not come naturally. **Positive parenting** means doing everything possible to learn about and raise a child with a goal of **optimum development**. This includes the best possible prenatal and postnatal environments. Love, nurturance, and commitment are required. One point is clear: even though parents are not the only factors in a child’s life, they are most significant and, as such, bear a high level of responsibility.

The scope of parenting cannot be covered in one chapter or even in an entire book. In learning how to create happiness, express feelings, manage stress, cope with

crises, transmit values, communicate, manage conflict, and give and receive criticism, you have developed strategies for positive parenting. You will learn more through other resources and formal training. This chapter will simply open the door to positive parenting and helpful strategies for success in different types of families. The rest is up to you. Raising children deserves priority and training (Fig. 13-1).

The Decision to Become a Parent

You did not select your parents; however, you can choose whether or not to become a parent. This decision will probably be the most important one you will ever make. If you are already a parent and did not give it a great deal of forethought, you are not alone and certainly it is not wise to berate yourself. Your choice now is to learn how to be a positive parent.

The ego states from transactional analysis (TA) are applicable. The “child” will emotionally want a baby and will, perhaps, see raising a child as pure pleasure. The “child” could also react selfishly and not want to parent responsibly. Your “parent” ego state may contain messages such as, “You better have a baby soon. Your biological clock is ticking” or “You cannot be truly fulfilled if you do not have a child.” A 19-year-old student told me that her grandmother wanted her to get married and quickly have a baby so that she could be a great-grandmother before she died. Parenting is a decision for your “adult” ego state to make. One suggestion is to read books about becoming a parent and raising children before you decide.

Factors to consider. Adults who are alcoholic or dependent on other drugs, codependent, abusive, rigid, punitive, overly judgmental, unloving, or extremely needy may be poor role models for children. A primary factor is the psychological health of the two prospective parents.

Before having children, it is best if a couple’s relationship is stable and time-tested. Bringing a baby into a new relationship is not advisable, and having a baby to strengthen a weak couple relationship is one of the poorest

reasons imaginable. A baby does not deserve the responsibility of saving a relationship; furthermore, this repair attempt invariably does not work. The transition to parenthood usually strains a couple. Keeping the relationship healthy continues to be important. A study showed that parenting satisfaction was significantly higher for adults whose marriages were of high quality (Rogers and White, 1998).

A critical question to answer is “Why do we want to have a child?” A list identifying advantages and disadvantages usually reveals more cons than pros. What comes to your mind when you think of the disadvantages? A typical immediate answer is sacrifice. What types of sacrifice?

Couples are realistic when they acknowledge that time, energy, a great deal of effort, and money are required. The estimated cost of raising a child born in 2003 until he or she is 17 is \$172,870 for families under \$38,000 annual before-tax income; \$235,670 for families under \$64,000; and for those above \$64,000 income, the amount is \$344,250. Expenses include housing, food, transportation, clothing, health care, education, child care, and miscellaneous items (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2004). A wise financial consideration also has to do with how many children are desired. Besides finances, parents’ other resources of time and energy are reduced with each child.

What about the positives? Parenting can be one the most rewarding human experiences. The benefits of having children include adding interest and enjoyment to life, opening additional avenues of pleasure and relating, and making life more meaningful. “Realizing that I have given life to a person who is enjoying life and contributing to this world is the greatest reward possible,” said a parent of a young adult.

Having a realistic picture of parenting and family life hopefully will cause you to think and hesitate. You may choose to be someone who does not have children, an option that has become increasingly more common. Because of the importance of the decision, you owe it to yourself and to a child to be careful and deliberate. Unlike other statuses you may choose, this one cannot be undone. After a thoughtful decision has been made, make another one to educate yourself.

Parent Education

In the movie *Parenthood*, a teenage boy talks about the irony of requiring fishing licenses to fish, hunting licenses to hunt, and driving licenses to drive, yet having no licensing requirement to become a parent. Society requires less to become a parent than to take on other statuses. Some states require a blood test for marriage.

The good news is that parent education classes and workshops are offered, organizations and support groups focus on family issues, and books and audiovisual aids are available. Importantly, these resources do work. Even with the number of offerings and the reported successes, the tragedy is that parents often do not take advantage of the educational opportunities available. “Canceled for lack of registrants” is a common frustration of those who offer parent courses. The assumption may be that such classes are canceled for lack of interest. Actually, the reason is more complex. Most parents are interested

What Positive Parents Can Learn

- Influences on the very important prenatal environment
- Erikson's stages of development and ways of helping children successfully achieve tasks at each stage
- Cognitive development stage theory as conceptualized by Jean Piaget (Piaget and Inhelder, 1969) including exploration within a child-safe environment and different ways that children learn and think
- Self-esteem and self-efficacy enhancement
- Child-raising techniques and methods

Figure 13-2

but are either unaware of how helpful education can be or do not think that they need training. Most parents-to-be take childbirth classes but not child-raising courses (Fig. 13-2).

What specifically is good for parents to learn? Check the list in "What Positive Parents Can Learn." This knowledge will not only help the child but will also make parenting less burdensome and more enjoyable.

If parents practice open communication and handle conflict positively, they will, by example, teach priceless skills. Children often model their relationships after adults in their lives. Simply stated, as a parent, whatever you learn and live will be evident to a child. Another advantage of parenting education is that the more you know, the more secure you can be as a parent. "The security of the parent about being a parent will eventually become the source of the child's feeling secure about self" (Bettelheim, 1987, p. 13).

Goals of Child Raising

One of the most valuable lessons a person can learn about parenting is from Deanna Eversoll, a University of Nebraska professor. "What do you want your child to be like at the age of 21?" she asked our class. After receiving several answers, such as responsible, honest, loving, happy, confident, and independent, she challenged us: "Do you know what to do, and what not to do, to help bring these about?" Parents are certainly not the only influence, yet they contribute immeasurably to the lives of their offspring.

In thinking about what you want, general ideas are preferable. Think "I want my child to be satisfied in a career," rather than "I want my child to be a doctor." This allows for flexibility and uniqueness. "I always wanted my child to get a 4-year degree," one of my students said. "But he seems perfectly happy learning automotive technology at a community college."

Whenever we try to push our children to become the people that they may be in our heads, we become less effective as parents. (Glasser, 1984)

Enabling children to discover who they want to be and then helping them to become people who are satisfied with life is a worthy goal. (Bettelheim, 1987)

In contrast to parents 60 or 70 years ago, modern parents seem to have different goals for their children. They are more likely to want their offspring to think for themselves, accept responsibility, show initiative, and be tolerant of opposing views. These characteristics replace such traits as obedience, conformity, and respect for home and church.

One student, in reply to the question about desired qualities in a child, said, "I want for us to be friends." Because parenting is a lifelong commitment, developing a deep friendship with an adult child is rewarding. Liking a child for the person he or she has become is a wonderful feeling.

Responsibilities of Parenting

If you took a moment to write a job description for parenting, what would you include? One weary-looking mother in a parenting workshop answered, "Drive them here and there and everywhere." Transportation is only one responsibility. The number of parental tasks is almost overwhelming, with some responsibilities being more important than others.

Developing love and trust. Children deserve to live in loving environments. According to Erikson's (1963) developmental theory, trust precedes the other stages, and the early years are critical. The most valuable parenting behavior during the first year is to demonstrate love by being responsive, warm, and nurturing. A child not touched enough will not develop properly; a child touched in a disturbed way will suffer. Adults who were maltreated as children include Charles Manson and Ted Bundy (Magid and McKelvey, 1989). Other outcomes are less dramatic yet still unfortunate.

Withdrawing from an infant also has repercussions. In comparing styles of mothering, babies of withdrawn mothers showed less optimal interactive behavior and had lower mental scores at 1 year (Jones et al., 1997). A convincing 36-year study, ending when the subjects were 41 years old, showed that those who had been raised with the most parental warmth and affection were more likely to have long and relatively happy marriages and close friendships and report greater happiness and less stress (Franz, McClelland, and Weinberger, 1991). Other studies support the benefits of parental warmth and closeness in the areas of physical and psychological health years later (Ornish, 1998). Demonstrated affection by cuddling, hugging, and other physical contact is meaningful at all ages (Fig. 13-3).



Figure 13-3 Trust develops through loving, supportive experiences.

When children are loved, they more easily develop an optimistic attitude. Also helpful is the book *The Optimistic Child* (Seligman, 1995). Love continues to be the foundation of positive parenting. As with intimate love, the focus should be on loving behaviors that foster positive personal growth and promote personal responsibility.

Encouraging wellness. Parents are responsible for feeding and overseeing other behaviors related to health. Almost all take care of their children's physical well-being. Important parenting

tasks include but are not limited to seeing that children are physically active, that they get adequate rest, and that they are strongly encouraged to develop healthy nutritional habits. Research reveals that children who ate breakfast had 40 percent higher math grades and were less apt to be absent or tardy from school from those who did not. The latter were more likely to be hyperactive and have a variety of psychosocial problems (Carper, 2000). Parents must be firm. "What can I do?" asked one. "I try to get them to eat healthy foods, but they just will not." In such cases, wise parents do not give children a choice. For example, my daughters had only what we called "special juice," a blend of apple and grape juice instead of the extremely popular sugar-laden drinks. The examples parents set in this regard are also significant. A child's degree of wellness is greatly influenced by parental choices.

Building self-esteem and self-efficacy. Two all-important responsibilities are the encouragement of children's high self-esteem and the fostering of self-efficacy. The most important task of parenthood is, as the authors of *Self-Esteem* (McKay and Fanning, 2000) describe, helping a child develop high self-worth. In the course of constructing self-esteem, a child is likely to develop an internal locus of control and other positive behaviors discussed earlier in this book. During the early childhood stages, wise parents help their children develop what Erikson (1963) called autonomy and initiative. Encouraging a child to develop skills and talents and to teach "I can do that" instead of "I cannot" helps foster the beliefs that lead to self-efficacy expectancies.

Adults are teachers of and models for self-esteem, and they cannot teach or model what they do not know. Before parenting, building your own self-esteem, as discussed in Chapter 1, is highly recommended. If you became a parent before your own self-esteem was high, do all you can to create a positive outlook on life. Also important are your parenting behaviors. The language and nonverbal behaviors you use with a child are building blocks of self-image and self-worth. "Every day, in the hundreds of interactions you have with your children, you mirror back to them who they are. Like a sculptor's tools on soft clay, your words and tone of voice shape their sense of self" (McKay and Fanning, 2000, p. 293).

Offering positive comments for being capable and for doing well helps to build self-esteem and strengthens self-efficacy. In the TA framework, giving positive strokes is a primary parenting behavior. The "how" of praising is important and descriptive recognition is recommended. The words tell about a specific event and the parent's specific feelings; a child can then draw a general conclusion about personality and character (Ginott, 1969). Here is an example of descriptive recognition: "I really appreciate your helping clean the house. I especially like the job you did in your own room. I am relieved that such a big job is done." An example of evaluative praise, which is not recommended, is "You are an angel. I could not ask for a sweeter daughter. I do not know what I would do without you." When you allow the child to infer positives from your descriptions, the message is stronger. "Our words should be like a magic canvas upon which a child can not help but paint a positive picture of self" (Ginott, 1965, p. 42).

Praise does not have to be present-oriented. If a child is not doing much now to deserve descriptive recognition, recall past situations. Positive offerings just for being alive are rare and are precious gifts of unconditional positive regard and deep love. Priceless is the assurance that what a child *is* counts more than what he or she does.

As valuable as praise is, it can be detrimental when it's unrealistic or lavish. Overpraising is often uncomfortable for children and may put pressure on them to try to live up to an unrealistic standard (McKay and Fanning, 2000). Telling children over and over that they are perfect, wonderful, and angelic will probably be rejected and may even be behaviorally refuted later. Parents should encourage achievement that builds self-esteem. Children then can prove to themselves that they are worthy. A strong recommendation is to avoid backhanded compliments, ones that mix praise with insult (McKay and Fanning, 2000). Examples are "I like the way you cleaned your room . . . for a change" or "I just cannot believe you did so well on your math test." Like adults, children can be hurt by the implied criticism and are better off without any praise at all.

Positive parents will deliver small quantities of criticism in nonhurtful ways. As discussed earlier, criticism delivered with "I" statements and directed toward undesirable behavior will get a better reception and, more importantly, is unlikely to damage self-esteem. A skillful parent will set boundaries and limits and enforce these in consistent ways. One expert describes it as a delicate balance of casting out a fishing line while still holding the rod and reel (Vinton, 1998).

Avoid destructive language styles. These include generalizations (the grandiose type of closed communication) and vague or violent threats such as, "Try that again and you will find out how mad I can get" or "If you do that one more time, I will spank you so hard you won't be able to sit down." Body language and paralinguistics can also be potentially damaging. Facial expressions of disgust and anger and sarcastic tones of voice, among others, are potentially detrimental. Not addressing issues of concern and playing the "silent game" are not recommended (McKay and Fanning, 2000).

Constructive criticism points out possibilities for improvement and omits any negative remarks about the child's personality (Ginott, 1965). Matt inadvertently spilled a glass of milk. His parents' criticisms were not constructive:

"You are old enough to know how to hold a glass! How many times have I told you to be careful?"

"He cannot help it—he is so clumsy. He always was and always will be."

Consider that Matt spilled a few cents' worth of milk, yet the caustic remarks are likely to cost much more in terms of self-regard. When you make a situation personal, you damage the relationship and destroy a child's self-esteem (Fig. 13-4).



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Children who are spoken to abusively learn to verbally abuse others. These four steps are recommended when correcting a child (McKay and Fanning, 2000):

1. Describe the situation or behavior in nonjudgmental language. ("I notice that you have not cleaned your room yet.")
2. Give a reason for wanting behavior to change. ("I am frustrated when you procrastinate.")
3. Acknowledge the child's feelings and thoughts. ("I know how busy you have been" or "I realize that schoolwork has been stressful lately.")
4. State a clear expectation. ("I want the room cleaned before you go out tonight.")

Parents who place unrealistic expectations on a child do not contribute to either self-esteem or self-efficacy. "I know you can do better," a parent says looking at a report card with mostly Bs. Maybe a B is the best a child can do. Unrealistic expectations, especially about behavior, are frequently the result of what is called "adultism," which occurs when adults forget what it is like to be a child. They then expect and require a child, who has never been an adult, to think, act, understand, and do things as an adult would (Glenn and Nelsen, 1989). Instead, parents should try to know their children well and then be realistically encouraging.

"What can I do to help my son rid himself of 'cannots'?" asked a parent. As discussed in Chapter 4, a "cannot" is extremely limiting to the development of self-efficacy. First, model and encourage children to resist using the word cannot. Then provide opportunities for them to demonstrate what they can do and praise appropriately. According to Erikson (1963), if young children have developed autonomy and initiative, they will move forward to industry versus inferiority. During all three stages, a parent can encourage self-efficacy in children.

Positive parenting behaviors and interactions contribute to **attachment**, the positive emotional bond that develops between a child and another person. The self-image of adolescents was found to be significantly strengthened by attachment to their parents (O'Koon, 1997). In essence, when children develop high self-esteem and self-efficacy, the other responsibilities of parenting are easier and, most importantly, a parent has served a child well.

Developing emotional well-being. Children are affected by their parents' emotional state. An essential task for parents is to develop positive emotional selves so that they will be able to teach and model healthy emotionality. Children with emotionally competent parents are calmer, less whiney, better able to cope, better able to focus their attention, much less negative when playing with friends, less stressed, and more likely to try new things. In addition to using the material presented earlier, a few specific points can be beneficial.

Parents sometimes use the common emotional weapons of guilt and intimidation with grave psychological consequences (Bloomfield, 1996b). The **martyr parent** seeks to instill guilt in children: "How could you do this to me?" "I do not deserve this kind of treatment." "I have given you everything." "I went without so you could have all the nice things." If you recognize any of these messages, because you once received them or because you now give them, realize that the child translates the message as "Being who I am hurts my parent" and "I am not good or nice enough."

The **dictator parent** has the same motive as the martyr parent: to control the child's life even after the child is an adult. The method is intimidation. Fear-inducing statements and temper outbursts are common: "I am the boss around here, and you do what I say." "Do not talk back to me." "You do that again, and I will smack you hard." "Do it or else. Remember, I am your mother." The child remembers quite well. The reason given for the threats and abuse is that the parent knows what is best and is acting in the child's interest. However, the parent is actually inflicting great harm. Trying to produce fear in order to control is the parent's objective; the result is a fearful child.

Do you know any parents who "overparent?" A potentially damaging behavior is the compulsion to help and direct others and do for them what they could be doing for themselves. Such behavior does not serve the best interests of children. In adulthood, they may find it hard to take care of themselves. Playing either the martyr or dictator role or overparenting are not positive parenting practices.

Worrying can be passed down from generation to generation because it is learned behavior. "I am a worrywart just like my mom." How sad that a parent taught a child to worry. If you worry a lot, let children know that they did not cause it. Messages like "I cannot help worrying. That is what parents do," "I love you so much, and you cause me so much worry" are hard on young people. Children placed in this position almost always grow up to be worriers. The truth is that the adults undoubtedly worried before the child was born and are now using the child as a scapegoat. Instead, a positive parent teaches a child to look critically at worries and to challenge them. He or she teaches the joy of problem solving rather than the anguish of fretting.

As discussed in Chapter 5, one's family is a powerful influence on emotional expression. Cold, unemotional children and young adults frequently come from cold, unemotional parents. If children are raised in a cold emotional climate, they become victims of victims. In such an environment, people frequently feel one way and act another, experience few positive emotional expressions, and are subject to hysterical, manipulative outbursts (Rubin, 1998). A healthy emotional climate is maintained by parents who know that:

Love does not hurt, it feels good. Loving behavior nourishes your emotional well-being. When someone is being loving to you, you feel accepted, cared for, valued, and respected. Genuine love creates feelings of warmth, pleasure, safety, stability, and inner peace. (Rubin, 1998, p. 324)

Knowing what not to do is important; additionally, learning what to do can result in an emotionally intelligent child. EQ (emotional quotient) was discussed in Chapter 5, and parents can contribute to their own child's abilities. How to do so is explained in the book *The Heart of Parenting* (Gottman, 1997). As emotional coaches, parents should do the following:

1. Be aware of your child's emotions, including the most subtle clues.
2. View emotions as an opportunity for intimacy or teaching.
3. Listen empathically and validate a child's feelings.
4. Assist a child in verbally labeling her or his emotions.
5. Help solve a problem by setting limits. For example, "It is okay to be mad at her for not sharing a toy; it's not acceptable to just take it from her."

Teaching children to manage angry feelings is a vital aspect of discipline. Some suggestions are to instruct them in deep breathing and visualization of peaceful settings, counting to 10, working off tension with physical activity, and communicating verbally or through writing (Ginsburg, Fein, and Johnson, 1998). Parents can be effective teachers and trainers in emotional development, which profoundly influences all aspects of life.

Developing positive social relationships. Social development begins with life. As pointed out, trust is the cornerstone of psychosocial development. In all stages, parents play significant roles; knowing what and how to encourage is beneficial.

The identity stage is one of the most challenging stages for both adults and children. It usually begins and is in “full bloom” during adolescence. The more you know about typical adolescent behavior the better parenting skills you will have and the more you will enjoy your teenager. The book *You and Your Adolescent* (Steinberg and Levine, 1997) is a good resource. The authors assure us that the horror stories about adolescence are false and point out that 9 out of 10 teenagers do not get into trouble. The book is full of accurate information about adolescent development plus enjoyable ways to enhance the relationship. Trusting children by assuming the best and treating them with the same respect parents extend to total strangers are worthy recommendations. Positive parents help an adolescent achieve independence and do not put them in a double bind by steering them toward independence and then objecting to how they do things.

Children of all ages learn from their families how to be social creatures. Even though families are not the only socializing agents, we still develop much of our social selves at home. In terms of relationships, love and intimacy are taught or not taught in the family. Parents have a tremendous responsibility to model intimate adult relationships and to help children feel connected to others.

Showing an active interest. Being actively interested in what your child does shows love and respect. A study of 10,000 high school students revealed another benefit. Parents who were more involved in their adolescents’ schooling had children who performed better in school (Bogenschneider, 1997). One might think that interest and involvement would automatically be demonstrated; yet, too often, parents seem indifferent. “My folks never came to school events,” said Shelly. “Even when I was a homecoming queen finalist, they were not there.” Times may have changed; however, the need for demonstrated interest and support remains as strong as ever. With increasing numbers of career responsibilities and other activities and interests, parents who make the time and effort are to be commended.

A Special Word to Fathers

In the past, a mother was responsible for child raising whereas the dad was often seen either as someone who came and went as a heavy disciplinarian. That scenario has changed for many. Today, fathers are more equal to mothers in caring for children, especially on weekends. They also are involved in a variety of their children’s activities beyond play and companionship. One factor that made a



Figure 13-5 Fathers play an invaluable part in their children's development.

difference was the mother's contribution to family income (Yeung et al., 2001). Another was the attitude the father had regarding gender roles. A study showed that egalitarian men not only want children more than traditional males, but they also want to share with their partners and be involved in caring for their children (Kaufman, 2000). Fathers appear to be as important as mothers in the traditionally feminine role of emotionality (Cummings and O'Reilly, 1997). They are important in all other aspects as well. A study of dual-earner couples showed that shared par-

enting was associated with both closeness to children and marital satisfaction (Ehrenberg et al., 2001).

Common understandings of "to mother" and "to father" are quite different. Whereas the former brings forth an image of nurturing, "to father" means to impregnate. Happily, fathering is enjoying a broader meaning with the benefits of being fathered, as well as mothered, becoming widely recognized. Entire books are devoted to fathering (Hawkins and Dollanite, 1997), and studies on infant temperament and emotionality include the effects of both mothering and fathering (Park et al., 1997). Yet the attitude that a mother is the primary parent is sometimes subtle and resistant to change. This was demonstrated in class when a woman commented that her husband was home baby-sitting. She was asked if her husband was the children's father. He was. "Then why call it baby-sitting?" asked another student. "Do you call it baby-sitting when you stay home with them?" (Fig. 13-5).

Only recently has society acknowledged gay fathers. Contrary to popular stereotypes, children of gay fathers are no more likely to be gay, no more likely to be sexually abused, and not at any significant disadvantage when compared with children of heterosexual fathers (Patterson and Chan, 1997). A study showed that 91 percent of adult sons of gay fathers were heterosexual. Those who were gay had actually lived with their fathers fewer numbers of years than the heterosexual offspring, adding to the belief that environmental conditions are not responsible for one's sexual orientation (Bailey et al., 1995). Eric, in his generous, loving way, adopted a child who had been abandoned by her single mother. "My only concern is any repercussions my daughter might face because I am not accepted by many in society because I am gay," he said during a class panel on parenting. Hopefully, there will be none, and she is lucky to have such a loving father.

Fathers have great impact and are as important as mothers in the overall development of children. Societal attitudes that support the role of men in the lives of children need strengthening whereas fathers who want to be involved in an affirmative way are advised to learn as much about positive parenting as they can. For the most part, fathers today want more involvement and are taking parental responsibilities seriously. Greg, who is a wonderful hands-on dad, said, "Being a dad is the most tremendous feeling in the world. I cannot imagine life without my children."

Beginning at the earliest stages of life, a child's entire being is in the hands of the caregiving adults. Each child deserves and profits from the love, warmth, and support of both parents.

Discipline and Its Multifaceted Dimensions

Discipline is an area in which education is sorely needed. Ask adults to define discipline, and you get such answers as "making a child mind you," "correcting a child," or "teaching a child right from wrong." Ask children and you are likely to hear "getting punished" or "not being allowed to watch TV." Parents often use only punishment to accomplish the task of disciplining their children.

A broader definition of **discipline** is the entire process of teaching and guiding children from infancy to adulthood. The word *discipline* means "to teach," not "to punish" or "to hurt." Loving discipline is an essential ingredient in child rearing (Ginsburg, Fein, and Johnson, 1998). The parent has a role of leader and teacher, and the children are learners. Discipline is multifaceted, and parents use a variety of child-rearing techniques to guide children. What you want your child to be like becomes the goal of discipline.

When people think about discipline, they do not usually picture anything positive. The broader concept of discipline is affirmative rather than negative. Punishment should be used sparingly and as a last resort. Inappropriate punishment, which is harsh, unreasonable, violent, or harmful, is never recommended. Parents use such punishment because (1) it brings about immediate change, (2) they are not sure of what else to do, (3) they fear losing their authority, and (4) they have not been taught other methods. If you picture discipline as a pie, *appropriate* punishment is the smallest possible slice. The rest of the pie is filled with various techniques and methods described later. This concept of discipline has unlimited potential!

Parenting Styles Defined

Parenting is a complex activity that includes many specific behaviors that work individually and together to influence child outcomes. Most researchers who attempt to describe this broad parental milieu rely on Diana Baumrind's concept of parenting style. Parenting style is meant to describe normal variations in parenting. In other words, the parenting style typology Baumrind developed should not be understood to include deviant parenting, such as might be observed in abusive or neglectful homes. Although parents may differ in how they try to control or socialize their children and the extent to which they do so, it is assumed that the primary role of all parents is to influence, teach, and control their children.

Parenting style captures two important elements of parenting: parental responsiveness and parental demandingness (Maccoby and Martin, 1983). Parental responsiveness (also referred to as parental warmth or supportiveness) refers to "the extent to which parents intentionally foster individuality, self-regulation, and self-assertion by being attuned, supportive, and acquiescent to children's special needs and demands" (Baumrind, 1991, p. 62). Parental demandingness (also referred

to as behavioral control) refers to “the claims parents make on children to become integrated into the family whole, by their maturity demands, supervision, disciplinary efforts and willingness to confront the child who disobeys” (Baumrind, 1991, pp. 61–62).

Four Parenting Styles

Categorizing parents according to whether they are high or low on parental demandingness and responsiveness creates a typology of four parenting styles: indulgent, authoritarian, authoritative, and uninvolved (Maccoby and Martin, 1983). Each of these parenting styles reflects different naturally occurring patterns of parental values, practices, and behaviors (Baumrind, 1991) and a distinct balance of responsiveness and demandingness.

Indulgent parents (also referred to as “permissive”) “are more responsive than they are demanding. They are nontraditional and lenient, do not require mature behavior, allow considerable self-regulation, and avoid confrontation” (Baumrind, 1991, p. 62). When parents are permissive children often feel insecure and do not understand the meaning of cause and effect. Permissiveness is not likely to lead to responsible adult behavior and may encourage selfishness and self-indulgence.

Authoritarian parents are highly demanding and directive but not responsive. “They are obedience- and status-oriented, and expect their orders to be obeyed without explanation” (Baumrind, 1991, p. 62). These parents provide well-ordered and structured environments with clearly stated rules. Punitive disciplinary action is common, which often leads to further disobedience. Few desirable qualities are developed with authoritarian discipline. The chances of being loving with high regard for the self are slim.

Authoritative parents are both demanding and responsive. “They monitor and impart clear standards for their children’s conduct. They are assertive, but not intrusive and restrictive. Their disciplinary methods are supportive, rather than punitive. They want their children to be assertive as well as socially responsible, and self-regulated as well as cooperative” (Baumrind, 1991, p. 62). Just as authoritative parents appear to be able to balance their conformity demands with their respect for their children’s individuality, so children from authoritative homes appear to be able to balance the claims of external conformity and achievement demands with their need for individuation and autonomy.

Uninvolved parents are low in both responsiveness and demandingness. In extreme cases, this parenting style might encompass both rejecting–neglecting and neglectful parents. These parents are often unaware of who their children’s friends are, school or extracurricular activities their children are involved in and in extreme cases the children are left to raise themselves.

Because parenting style is a typology, rather than a linear combination of responsiveness and demandingness, each parenting style is more than the sum of its parts (Baumrind, 1991).

One key difference between authoritarian and authoritative parenting is in the dimension of psychological control. Both authoritarian and authoritative parents place high demands on their children and expect their children to behave

appropriately and obey parental rules. Authoritarian parents also expect their children to accept their judgments, values, and goals without questioning. In contrast, authoritative parents are more open to give-and-take with their children and make greater use of explanations. Thus, although authoritative and authoritarian parents are equally high in behavioral control, authoritative parents tend to be low in psychological control, whereas authoritarian parents tend to be high.

Consequences for Children

Parenting style has been found to predict child well-being in the domains of social competence, academic performance, psychosocial development, and problem behavior. Research based on parent interviews, child reports, and parent observations consistently finds:

- Children and adolescents whose parents are authoritative rate themselves and are rated by objective measures as more socially and instrumentally competent than those whose parents are nonauthoritative.
- Children and adolescents whose parents are uninvolved perform most poorly in all domains.

In general, parental responsiveness predicts social competence and psychosocial functioning, whereas parental demandingness is associated with instrumental competence and behavioral control (i.e., academic performance and deviance). These findings indicate:

- Children and adolescents from authoritarian families (high in demandingness, but low in responsiveness) tend to perform moderately well in school and be uninvolved in problem behavior, but they have poorer social skills, lower self-esteem, and higher levels of depression.
- Children and adolescents from indulgent homes (high in responsiveness, low in demandingness) are more likely to be involved in problem behavior and perform less well in school, but they have higher self-esteem, better social skills, and lower levels of depression.

The benefits of authoritative parenting and the detrimental effects of uninvolved parenting are evident as early as the preschool years and continue throughout adolescence and into early adulthood.

Democratic Style of Parenting

Authoritative parenting, sometimes referred to as the “democratic style” of decision making, balances clear, high parental demands with emotional responsiveness and recognition of child autonomy. The parent is a leader, guide, and teacher. As such, he or she is approachable, reasonable, flexible, and affirming. A child is encouraged to think, contribute, and cooperate. Power is not a major issue and is shared as much as possible. Open communication is the norm. Who determines the “rules?” The most powerful aspect of democratic discipline

and why it is so effective is that input regarding guidelines and consequences comes from all who are able to contribute. Young people are more likely to adopt family attitudes and norms when their voices are heard (Brody, Moore, and Gleib, 1994). If you are an employee, are you not more likely to comply with policies if you have been involved in their formation? Children react similarly in usually cooperative ways. Periodically the family can evaluate the guidelines and the consequences.

Recent studies have focused on **corporal punishment**, the use of physical force with the intention of causing pain but not injury for purposes of coercion or control (Straus and Yodanis, 1996). The common habit of spanking is a form of corporal punishment and used by all types of parents. To spank or not to spank is a dilemma for most parents. About 10 percent spank and see nothing wrong with it, about 20 percent never spank, and about 70 percent do and wish they had not (Severe, 1997). For children younger than 2 years old or for adolescents, social scientists generally agree that spanking should not be used (Gunnos and Mariner, 1997). Beyond that and confusing to parents is the disagreement among the experts. Some are adamantly opposed to any use of corporal punishment whereas others say that light spanking probably does no harm. Almost all argue against harsh punishments. One study found a direct link between frequency of spanking and slapping during childhood and future problems with anxiety disorder, alcohol abuse, and other problems (MacMillan, 1999). Others recommend that parents be trained in alternative strategies of discipline (Day, Peterson, and McCracken, 1998).

In order to sort it out, parents can read an enlightening chapter in the book *How to Behave So Your Children Will, Too!* (Severe, 1997). Whether one believes that spanking may be harmless, a strong recommendation is that parents realize that there are dozens of alternatives to any use of corporal punishment. Sparing a child by sparing the rod is in everyone's best interests.

Openly communicate. One of the most powerful tools of discipline for parents is open communication. How strange that some parents forget to use it! Verbalizing openly and listening actively and receptively may be all that is required in changing a child's behavior. The use of "I" messages and active listening will make a major difference. When our children were asked about discipline on a television program, I was heartened to hear them say, "We were hardly ever grounded or punished. Instead we talked things out."

Model the behavior you want. Realizing that parents will have adult privileges that children do not have, discipline includes the positive examples you set. As in transmitting values, your actions will speak louder than words. Children are quite susceptible to watching and then doing. For example, children's tobacco and alcohol use is associated with parents' use (Jackson et al., 1997). Parents also model how to express feelings. Parents discipline simply by the way they live their lives (Fig. 13-6).

Apply behavior modification techniques. Learning theory offers a variety of tools. The ones that will be effective depend on the age and personality of a child. With young children, changing the environment by **redirection**, either

Time-Out Prescription (Azerrad and Chance, 2001)

Assume that your daughter has hit another child. Follow these steps.

1. Say to her, "We do not hit other people." Say nothing more.
2. Take her by the hand and seat her in a small chair facing a blank wall. If she attempts to leave, immediately return her to it.
3. Make sure she stays there for three minutes. Ignore *all* of her behaviors such as screaming, crying, or hitting the wall. Say nothing.
4. After three minutes, keep her in the chair until she is quiet and well-behaved for five more seconds. Then tell her she has been good and may leave the chair.
5. Say nothing about time-out except that "We do not hit other people."

Figure 13-6

attracting them to an alternate location or by diverting their attention, is often sufficient. For example, a 2-year-old is naturally curious (and stubborn!) and will likely attempt to open a cupboard door against your wishes. You can simply get the child involved elsewhere. If a child is not in danger and not likely to be harmed or hurt others, ignoring misbehavior can be effective because children do misbehave to get attention. In fact, studies show that problem behavior is typically the result of misplaced adult attention. In other words, parents tend to pay too much attention to a child who is misbehaving (Azerrad and Chance, 2001).

Time-out means moving a misbehaving child to a neutral (nonentertaining) location for a brief period of time. A child psychologist (Azerrad and Chance 2001) recommends that an adult first ignore minor misbehavior, pay more attention to children when they behave well, and reserve time-out for particularly immature or potentially injurious behaviors. Highly recommended is Azerrad's "Time-Out Prescription."

Time-out does not work all of the time with all children, and it can be overused. And some children enjoy it. "My nephew loves time-out. He sits with his head down and hums, whistles, and smiles." In this case, the method does not deter misbehavior.

Rewarding desired behavior can work miracles. **Positive reinforcement** is presenting a positive stimulus in an attempt to increase or strengthen behavior. Adults relish rewards; so do children. After reading a book on behavior modification, a mother shared a success story:

My 4-year-old girl misplaced her shoes daily. When we got ready to go somewhere, we had to look for shoes. I scolded and even spanked occasionally with no luck. From a book, I got a new idea. I put a large box in her room and told her that this was her special shoe box. Each night I counted the number of shoes in the box, and she received stickers for each shoe, which she could later use for treats. She has not misplaced a shoe for a month.

The stickers were powerful positive reinforcers. Unfortunately, parents forget to apply an important principle of learning theory, which is that human beings

generally seek pleasure or rewards. Verbal awards may be more beneficial than material ones because material rewards can lead children to become motivated only by external factors. Large doses of verbal praise are preferable.

As children get older, different behavior modification methods are more effective. Positive reinforcement continues to be effective. In addition, parents can use **contracting** in which an agreement about specific behaviors is developed. A negotiation process is effective with adolescents. Involving teenagers in discussions about their behaviors shows respect and acknowledges that they can be responsible.

Use logical consequences. In order to be prepared for adulthood and responsibility, it is important that a child experience consequences. For a child who is old enough to understand, the use of logical consequences as a method of discipline is amazingly effective. The consequences can be natural ones. If a child carelessly breaks a toy, it is no longer available. As in values development, allowing natural consequences to occur is hard on a loving parent yet invaluable in developing responsibility. Consequences can also be created. A key element is including the child in formulating consequences. Some descriptions of effective and fair consequences follow (McKay and Fanning, 2000).

Reasonable: If a child is 45 minutes late coming home after a movie, an earlier time could be set the next time. Grounding someone for a week is not reasonable. In fact, grounding is a consequence (sometimes a punishment for unrelated misbehavior) that can be overused. And it is often as hard on the parents as it is on the child!

Related: If children are careless in completing a task, they are expected to do it over rather than have television privileges suspended. Making the consequences relate to the misbehavior makes sense.

Timely: If grades are unusually low, and the consequence is imposed study time, the time to start is that day. Waiting too long to impose consequences makes them irrelevant.

Consistent: How many times have you heard a parent say, "If you do that one more time, . . ." and the behavior continues? If the consequence for hitting a sibling is time-out, then a parent imposes the consequence until the behavior is changed. If time-out isn't working, change the consequence.

Understandable in advance: If children have input, they will know the consequences before they misbehave. If a bicycle left outside is stolen, the child will already know that money will have to be earned to replace it. Unforeseen situations may occur; a parent can then impose reasonable consequences or involve the child in the process.

Sharon Hanna recalled a favorite story about consequences and her stepson Greg, who was usually quite even-tempered. A phone conversation with a girl got the best of him. He hit the stairwell wall, making a hole in it. "The wall has to be fixed," was her reaction. He paid for, patched, and even painted the entire stairwell! Greg has not used his fist on a wall since. The use of consequences teaches responsibility and prevents parents from having to nag, scold, and use other punitive measures. A child's self-esteem usually remains intact, and the feeling of responsibility can even give it a boost.

The “Why” of Democratic Discipline

- Decreases the likelihood of developing negative traits and behaviors while establishing a fertile ground for the development of positive ones
- Involves children in such a way that it promotes self-discipline
- Teaches children how to live peacefully and cooperatively
- Enhances loving parent–children relationships

Figure 13-7

Provide structure. Planning with children how the household will operate is an excellent strategy. Having an established system and designated tasks decreases the number of times a parent feels a need to intervene. A family meeting is a good forum to use. A parent can introduce the idea by saying, “I want to include everyone in deciding how our household is going to function. A family is a team: a home requires care and maintenance. Let’s first decide what needs to be done, how often, and then how it will be accomplished.” For excellent tips on family meetings, read *Positive Discipline* (Nelsen, 1996), a book written for both parents and teachers. Meetings are best if used for positive reasons rather than for problem ones. For a first meeting, plan a family outing or trip. Regarding tasks, my stepfamily used a system in which the children had daily and weekly duties designated by number. I still smile when I think of the neighbors’ reaction to one child’s yelling to another, “Come on in. It is time for you to do number 2!” The system was not foolproof, and consequences were a part of it. However, it saved hours of complaining and nagging (Fig. 13-7).

Positive Parenting Behaviors

What a parent does and does not do plays an important role in a child’s development; yet parents often forget to focus on their own actions. Positive parents practice the following:

Admitting a mistake. You may wish to be an ideal parent, yet perfection is not possible. A stress-reducing aspect of positive parenting is that parents are allowed to make mistakes. Those who are able to admit an error and apologize to their children are to be commended, because children then learn a valuable lesson. “I never heard either of my parents apologize to each other or to us kids. I would have respected them so much more if they had. I find that I have difficulty saying ‘I am sorry,’ but I am working on it,” said one man. When you apologize to your children, you teach them to trust their feelings and perceptions. “You are right. I did act unfairly.” Then taking responsibility for your mistakes puts the “icing on the cake.” A sincere apology is a sign of love.

Spending quality time with children. I would love to have a dollar for the number of times I have heard people say, “I wish I had spent more time with my children. The years went by so fast.” Would not it be wonderful if nobody had

those regrets? Modern parents are spending four to six more hours a week with their children than did previous generations. Especially affirming is that working mothers are spending even more time (26.5 hours a week) with their children as stay-at-home moms did in 1981 (26 hours) (Wingert, 2001). Positive parenting means you have fun with children. Laughing together is stress reducing and promotes bonding. “Appreciate the child within you and each other. Especially in families, let the child in each of you romp. Having fun together is positive bonding” (Satir, 1988, p. 330).

Communicating openly. Most important are communicating with and showing genuine interest in children as individuals. Talking and listening to your child are probably the most positive and rewarding parenting experiences of all. Open communication is preferable. As discussed previously, a poor communication habit is to ask “why” questions, especially those that concern personal feelings and motivations. Interestingly, parents feel justified asking a child, “Why were you late?” and resent the same question asked of them by a child. “Why did you break that dish?” is a poor question unless you honestly believe a child did so deliberately, which usually is not the case. A feeling of discomfort or defensiveness is a typical response to a “why.” Open communication is a hallmark of positive parenting!

Demonstrating warmth and affection. Positive parents are warm and affectionate and express their feelings nonverbally and verbally. The importance of demonstrativeness has been repeatedly pointed out in this book and deserves special emphasis between parents and children. Would you want your children to have high self-esteem, and when they are young adults, be more capable of congenial relationships? A longitudinal study showed that these were the outcomes when parents demonstrated high levels of warmth and affection (Franz, McClelland, and Weinberger, 1991). Children whose parents are physically affectionate and warm have a definite advantage (Fig. 13-8).



Figure 13-8 A warm hug is good for both parents and children.

Some parents tend to refrain from physical expressions of love, especially with older children. “I knew my dad loved me, but I would have loved to hear him say it just once,” said a student. When peers become important, a child shuns demonstrated affection from parents, especially big hugs and kisses. Parents can still hug children in private and find other ways to show their love. If demonstrating warm feelings is personally difficult for you, attack the problem. In order to develop a jogging regimen, an adult may have to say, “I will run five miles each day.” The same adult can say, “I will hug my child at least once today.”

Showing appreciation and consideration. Being polite, saying “thank you,” and showing appreciation seem simple, yet many do not practice

these within the family. Parents and children take for granted the kind deeds of family members and neglect courtesies they extend to other people. A positive parent makes a point of expressing gratitude on a regular basis. Children then learn from observation and benefit from feeling respected.

Teaching and modeling a core values system. The foundation of a child's values is built in the family. As discussed in Chapter 3, parents have a powerful influence especially during the early, formative years. Neither moralizing nor permissiveness is recommended, and you are advised to review the chapter and the methods that seem to produce the most positive results. Rather than try to instill several specific values in a child, a wise course of action is to teach and model a broad-based core set. Especially important are beliefs in human dignity and freedom to live in harmony with one another coupled with values on self, health, and continued learning. "My folks never told me exactly what to do or not to do. Instead, they helped me realize that respect for others and peaceful interactions are essential. I weigh many of my values decisions on those basics," a student shared.

Exhibiting fairness and equality. In most cases, children benefit from settling their own disputes. When a parent intervenes, being fair and explaining the "why" of decisions are desirable. A mother wanted to be fair with her young daughters, Nicole and Cindy. To her, this meant keeping everything equal. When one received anything, so did the other. Their needs were different because Nicole was three years older. Yet she was expected to wait until Cindy was ready for such things as a bicycle. This led to her extreme resentment of Cindy. Understanding children's different developmental levels and explaining to them why they were not being treated exactly the same could have solved the problem. Children also differ in what they perceive as love. One may want more togetherness whereas another wants more privacy. Equal does not necessarily mean "same." Making one child overly responsible for another can lead to resentment. "I had to take my little brother everywhere. It got so I hated him," commented Sara.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, parents frequently compare siblings and set up undesirable competitive feelings. Comments such as, "I wish you would be more like your sister" or "Your brother never gives us any trouble" cultivate rivalry and resentment that can damage both a child and the sibling relationship. "Upon hearing these 'loving' comments, there is a desire to drop-kick a sibling into the next century" (Lang, 1990, p. 116). A positive parent treats children democratically and instills a cooperative, not competitive, attitude.

Emphasizing uniqueness and freedom from stereotypic restrictions. Each child is unique. Unconditional love means loving children for who they *are*, not for what they do. This does not mean you accept or like all behaviors; it means you love them no matter what.

Do you believe that your children will be exactly like you? You realize that each child will be unique. Knowledge of personality differences in preferences and types, as discussed in Chapter 2, can be helpful. A must-read in this area is *Nurture by Nature; Understanding Your Child's Personality Type and Become a Better*

REFLECT AND APPLY**Reflect**

- ◆ Which of the characteristics of a high-quality family describe your family of origin?
- ◆ If you were asked, “How were you disciplined as a child?” which style would it most fit? From your past, think of an example of learning from logical consequences.

Apply

- ◆ Ask someone who is a parent to describe their parenting behaviors.
- ◆ Write a brief description of what you would want a child of yours to be like at age 21. Importantly, if you have a child or if you plan to become a parent, make a commitment to raise a child in a way that this is likely to happen.
- ◆ Set up a simple behavior modification program based on rewards to change something about yourself. If you have children, do the same with them.

Parent (Tieger and Barron-Tieger, 1997). The authors believe that all four preferences are apparent by age 3 or 4 and, with some, by age 2. Kari sounded relieved as she told a class: “My mom is really extraverted. For years she told me I had a depression problem because I wanted to be alone in my room quite often. Now I know and can tell her that it is just because I have a strong preference for introversion. We are complete opposites!” Knowing your child’s type will also provide insight into discipline. With my older daughter, who is sensing and thinking, clear and logical communication was a necessity; because my younger one is intuitive and feeling, appealing to her emotional side was effective (Reflect and Apply).

As discussed earlier, stereotypic gender-role restrictions and expectations are limiting and unwise. “I expect the woman to wait on me. My mom always waited on my dad” and “I will get married and have him support me like my dad did my mom” are unrealistic ideas. An interesting study reveals that a mother’s gender-role attitudes when children are young and parental division of housework when children are adolescents predict children’s ideal allocation of housework at age 18. During all stages of growing up, maternal gender-role attitudes appear to influence adult children’s attitudes (Cunningham, 2001).

In a plea to parents, two authors (Levant and Brooks, 1997) make some salient points:

Child rearing may be a pivotal force in the reshaping of the culture itself. Just as there needs to be continued emphasis on helping young girls become better able to access instrumental and competitive skills, there must be corollary shifts in emphasis for young boys with a greater emphasis on interpersonal connection and the ability to interact cooperatively. Boys’ activities will need to become less gender-stereotyped with less devaluation of “feminine” activities. Interpersonal sensitivity, empathy, and compassion can receive greater emphasis as emotional skills for young boys. (Levant and Brooks, 1997, p. 265)

Rather than encouraging stereotypic roles, parents who wish to be gender-fair and encourage the best in their sons and daughters would do well to adopt an androgynous gender-role orientation and encourage the same in their children. Studies have shown that families with one or more androgynous parents generally score higher in parental warmth and support (Witt, 1997). Realizing the numerous benefits of an androgynous personality, one can conclude that parents who model and teach androgyny are helping their children and preparing them for a satisfying life.

Equally important, neither do young people in today's world benefit from the locked-in mentality of bigotry, nor does a society. Even if parents aren't free from prejudice, they do a child and the world a service by keeping these attitudes to themselves. Those who model acceptance of all races and cultures are setting the stage for a child to live harmoniously in today's world.

Applying reality therapy. Behaviors described in reality therapy (Glasser, 1965) can be very useful. One suggestion is to laugh and have fun with a child and avoid any criticism during playtimes. If parent and child are playing tennis for enjoyment, this is not the time for the parent to be a critic. The world does not end if a mistake is made, and helping a child learn this is positive. A positive comment may not be welcomed if it is unrealistic. An example of this would be a child playing golf with her mother and hitting the ball about 2 feet and the mother saying, "Great, honey, it went straight!" Somehow that would not be comforting. Can you think of other examples of unrealistic positive comments?

Reality therapy emphasizes choices and responsibility for one's own actions. A positive parent offers realistic choices, whereas authoritarian discipline offers none, and a permissive attitude allows unlimited choices. Giving young children choices, such as selecting among three different outfits for the day, helps them learn to choose within limits. Wise parents do not give options in all situations. "Do you want to go home now?" is a poor question if you, as the adult, have decided to go. Later, choices become more numerous and frequently more challenging for both child and parent. Courage is in order. Children need practice with decision making, yet parents are apt to be impatient or unwilling to allow the pain of seeing them fall on their face (Spezzano, 1992).

Reality therapy also suggests not accepting excuses. Teaching a child that excuses do not solve problems and are only temporary forms of relief, as discussed in Chapter 4, is important. An excellent book, *Raising a Responsible Child* (Dinkmeyer and McKay, 1996), says that the democratic approach to discipline works best because children have choices and are involved in decisions. A final ban from reality therapy is on hurting others, which includes yelling, hitting, and imposing excessive restrictions. Parents are powerful examples. "Do not yell at me," the mother screams. "But you have been yelling at me," protests the child. The usual response is, "I am the parent, so I can yell." Honestly, does that make sense?

Managing conflict successfully. All families experience conflict. If a child does not disagree with a parent, something is wrong. The child is either fearful or incapable of independent thought. The conflict management recommendations

discussed in previous chapters also work well in the parent–child relationship. How disagreement is handled is the key. Conflicts over power and control are especially prevalent during adolescence. A teenager strives for self-identity, independence, and separation from home. A normal adolescent will disagree, sometimes unrealistically. Parents can agree with a child’s perception while maintaining their own. Saying “I can see why you think that” or “You have a good point” shows respect and affirmation. Almost all adolescents care about their parents and want to be cared about, so conflict can be managed positively.

In the parent–child relationship, as in any relationship, giving in is not healthy. When children become angry and resentful, a loving parent sometimes caves in to stop these negative feelings or for the sake of peace. Sometimes it is much better to suffer painful emotions if you, as a parent, believe that the chosen course of action is heading in a positive direction. If conflict is managed fairly, emotional outbursts will be minimized in both number and intensity.

Even when children leave home, there is potential for conflict. This could be a carryover from unresolved hurts or newly emerging areas of disagreement. “My mom still thinks that everything I do is wrong, including how I handle my children,” said a young woman. “We just do not get along,” said a mother of an adult child. Breaking the cycle of negative patterns of behavior, opening up lines of communication, and finding forgiveness are discussed in the book *Making Peace with Your Parents* (Bloomfield, 1996b).

Positive parenting is a challenge and a commitment. Education, love, and dedication are required. A realization that you are not only parenting but also *training the next generation of parents* is sobering. If you are or plan to be a parent, be sure to do the activity on “Parenting Behaviors” in Reflections and Applications. The choice of learning and practicing positive parenting behaviors is among the most significant and potentially rewarding ones you will ever make.

Enjoying the Role of Grandparent

“I enjoy being a parent. I absolutely love being a grandparent!” is a commonly heard remark. Many people progress from parenting into special grandparent–grandchild relationships. Grandparents are different from yesteryear in that they are generally healthier, more educated, and more affluent. Because of a longer life span, the role of grandparent can last for many years. Possible roles of a grandparent are caregiver, educator, living ancestor, family historian, mentor, role model, playmate, and friend.

Grandparenting is increasingly becoming a subject of research. An overwhelming number of participants in an American Association of Retired Persons survey (Baker, 2001) said they are delighted in their role as grandparents with less than 1 percent reporting dissatisfaction. One confided, “All my troubles, aches, and pains go away when I am with them. They fill me with so much love.” They most commonly keep in touch by telephone and wish that they were together more. The most difficult part of grandparenting is keeping up with the energetic children. A survey of 11,000 grandparents by AARP (Baker, 2001) revealed the most satisfying aspects (see Fig. 13-9, “What Is Most Satisfying about Being a Grandparent?”).

What Is Most Satisfying about Being a Grandparent?

- Unconditional love without the burden of discipline
- Watching children grow and develop
- Seeing their faces light up when we come together
- Passing on family and religious values

Figure 13-9

Another study questioned grandchildren from ages 16 to 37. Emotional closeness was reported by 73.1 percent. The “close” group depicted a loving, nurturing grandparent whose devotion and attachment were evident. These grandparents were also described as a valuable source of family history, as well as good listeners—someone to whom anything could be told. The closeness was related to the grandparent’s interest in and appreciation for the grandchild, as well as availability for help and support (Boon and Brussoni, 1998).

Although the phenomenon of grandparents raising grandchildren is hardly new, it is an emerging social issue that is garnering a great deal of media attention due to its impact on the welfare of our nation’s most vulnerable members. Today, approximately 4 million children live with their grandparents. Further, the literature on this phenomenon suggests that there are probably many more children in informal care arrangements residing with their grandparents than the data can capture. According to U.S. census data, grandparents raise 6 percent of our nation’s children. That is a lot of children—4.5 million to be exact—and the number is growing rapidly.

Between 1990 and 2000, the number of children in the United States under age 18 increased by 14.3 percent; within that same decade, the number of U.S. children in grandparent-headed households increased by 30 percent. The data also indicate that grandparent-headed households are twice as likely to live in poverty as other American families.

Whether because of substance abuse, child abuse or neglect, incarceration, mental illness, or physical illness, biological parents of these children may not be able to care for them. Their grandparents—most of whom subsist on meager incomes—are called on to provide for the basic food, shelter, and clothing needs for millions of our nation’s children. Due to advanced age, poor health, poverty, minimal education, and lack of transportation, these grandparents are typically unable to provide the grandchildren in their care with much beyond their basic needs. Thus, the children continue to be at risk because their grandparents often have inadequate resources to raise them.

For the grandparents, the full-time care of their grandchildren is sometimes a surprise and almost always a return to responsibilities that they had thought were long past. Some grandparents are in their thirties or forties, but many are old enough to collect Social Security, and they have their share of aches and pains, as well as plans that usually did not include taking on child-rearing responsibilities again. Anyone with children can tell you that child rearing is a challenge. Grandparents have already met that challenge once with their own children, but in this second time around they face some unique disadvantages. Most of them are between ages 55 and 64, and many are over age 65. Although intergenerational

families cross all ethnic and socioeconomic lines, the growing numbers of grandparents raising grandchildren are far more likely to be persons of color and to live in poverty than those who are not (National Center on Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, 2005).

Understanding the Characteristics of a Strong Family

Strong families are not families without problems. Functional families are not, simply, the flip side of dysfunctional families. All families face challenges, but some families are better at dealing with them than others (Olson and DeFrain, 1994). The most extensive series of studies of family strengths and strong families has been done by Stinnett and his colleagues (DeFrain and Stinnett, 1992; Stinnett and DeFrain, 1985). In 20 years of study, the researchers have collected family strengths data on more than 10,000 families in the United States and in more than 20 countries around the world. Perhaps the most important finding is that families in various ethnic groups and cultures across the United States and around the world seem to be much more alike than different. These researchers proposed that six major qualities are common of strong families in the United States and other countries. These qualities are commitment, appreciation and affection, positive communication, time together, spiritual well-being, the ability to cope with stress and crisis (Stinnett and DeFrain, 1985) (Fig. 13-10).

Dual-Earner Households

A change affecting most families is the reality of dual-earner couples. Depending on the age of a child, the percentage of mothers who work outside the home ranges from 59 percent to 73 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). In 2000, both parents were employed in 64.2 percent of families with children under age 18 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2001). When both parents are employed, the common question is, “How does this affect a child?” As with many questions, studies do not necessarily agree. One showed that paternal employment was not consistently related to child outcomes (Harvey, 1999). Another looked at just maternal employment and noted a negative cognitive effect on white, but not on African American or non-Hispanic white, children (Han, Waldfogel, and Brooks-Gunn, 2001). A major study (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2001) showed mixed results (see Fig. 13-11, “Effects of Early Childhood Care”).



Figure 13-10 Families have certainly changed!

One point is clear. Parents will continue to work outside the home, and quality child care does make a positive difference. A study followed children over the first 7 years of their lives. Higher-quality child care was related to better mother–child relationships; lower

Effects of Early Childhood Care

- Of children who were in child care for more than 30 hours per week, 17 percent were regarded as being aggressive toward other children compared with 6 percent regarded as being aggressive when in child care for less than 10 hours per week.
- Children who spent more time in child care centers, as opposed to other types of child care, were more likely to display better language skills and have better short-term memory.

Figure 13-11

probability of insecure attachment; fewer reports of problem behaviors; and higher cognitive performance, language ability, and level of school readiness in the children. The opposite results were found when the care was of low quality. Family characteristics and the quality of the parent's relationship with the child were stronger predictors of children's development than the child care factors (Peth-Pierce, 1998).

Within the family, what will help is a fair division of household labor and child care responsibilities. Of utmost importance is the parent's use of time. A comparison between full-time mothers and ones who worked outside the home found no support for the idea that young children fare best when they have a mother at home full time. They concluded that full-time mothering is not critical to good child outcomes. What did make a significant difference was the time parents spent with the children (Bianchi and Robinson, 1997). Making the reality of dual-earner families a positive experience is of paramount importance.

Gay and Lesbian Households

Another type of family, usually composed of two employed adults and included in the broader family definition, is headed by a gay or lesbian couple. One or both of the adults may have already been a parent or the couple may choose to adopt or give birth. With the increase in cases of donor insemination comes an increase in lesbian-headed families. In 2003, at least 250,000 U.S. children were being raised in two-parent, same-sex homes (Barrett, 2004).

What do we know about families of gays and lesbians? In the face of more prejudice, discrimination, and oppression when compared with those headed by heterosexuals, these families show positive adjustment in supportive environments (Patterson, 2000). Except for social stigma, no other significant differences in self-concept development, behavioral problems, intelligence, and psychiatric evaluations have been found. Children raised in homosexual households almost always develop a heterosexual orientation; typically, they do not have problems with gender, emotional, and social development nor in relationships with others. Researchers conclude that the children mature in a positive manner, and they do not consider the sexual orientation of their parents as a meaningful predictor of successful child development. Many children benefit from being taught increased empathy, tolerance, and respect for differences (Fitzgerald, 1999). A short story is told by two women who each gave birth to one boy (Wingert and Kantrowitz, 2000):

One of our sons, Jacob, told a little girl at preschool that he had two moms. Later she told one of the moms, "I have two granddads, so I guess that Jacob can have two moms."

In addition to unreasonable intolerance that can be directed against gays, lesbians, and their children, another major challenge has to do with lack of legal recognition and rights. Some progress has been made in terms of public acceptance. As compared with 1977 when 43 percent of respondents said that homosexual relations should be legal, 54 percent in 2001 said the same (Newport, 2001). Adoption by a same-sex partner is allowed in some states although only 39 percent of the general public is in favor of adoption rights for gay partners (Wingert and Kantowitz, 2000). Perhaps, if those who are opposed come to understand that, as in all families, it is the quality of the relationships, not the structure, that makes a difference, the level of acceptance will rise (Fig. 13-12).

Adoptive Households

Compared to years ago when 80 percent of babies born out of wedlock in the United States were given up for adoption, in 2003 the rate was only 2 to 3 percent. Still there are at least 150,000 children adopted each year (Dunkin, 2000). Although having to deal with unique issues, such as explaining the adoption and the probable desire of a child to learn about biological parents, adoptive families compare quite favorably with biological units (Borders, Black, and Pasley, 1998). In one study, adoptive mothers reported spending more time with their children and having higher family cohesion than did mothers from other family types (Lansford et al., 2001).

Challenges include a societal assumption that biology equates to more love than is possible in an adoptive situation, emotional uncertainties, and, in many cases, an unknown genetic history. Yet, as Alison commented, "I have the best of two worlds—adoptive parents with whom I share a deep love and biological parents who made a very wise decision in my behalf."

Divorced Households

Divorce, a challenge for individuals as, discussed in Chapter 12, can be a process of family change if children are involved. A **binuclear family** is one in which marital separation has occurred (Ahrns, 1994). One reason for this term is to lessen the social stigma and deviant view. The phrase "child of a broken home," in contrast, is a negative label that conjures images of something that is faulty, unworkable, and unable to be fixed. The term *binuclear family* also shows that, even though a marriage ends, a family consisting of two biological parents continues.

Divorce occurs regularly in the United States. Since 1960, the divorce rate has more than doubled (Raymond, 2001). Obviously, millions of children are affected. No matter how positive the end results may be, the divorce of their parents is an extremely painful experience for children.

Perhaps no greater adjustment challenge exists than helping children cope with their parents' divorce. A positive beginning is to consider options to an

A Loving Family

The two parents took turns rocking 8-month-old Nicole, their precious daughter, during our informal interview. It was obvious that Dee and Shelly, a same-sex couple, share a stable, intimate love relationship and that their love for Nicole is unconditional and unlimited. “We have been together 6 years,” they said. “We talked about having a child but wanted to wait until we were sure that our relationship was stable. When a couple chooses artificial insemination, it is a conscious decision. Putting the child first means that you will be sure of yourself and of the relationship.”

When asked how they decided who would give birth, Dee with her quick wit, answered, “That was easy. I cannot handle pain!” Shelly added that age and family history were also important factors. Another decision had to do with the sperm donor. They considered a male friend but decided there were too many possible complications and opted for an anonymous donor from a highly reputable sperm bank. Seven attempts and thousands of dollars later, Shelly became pregnant.

In response to any negatives associated with the experience, they described a nonsupportive doctor and the muted feelings of joy related to pregnancy. “We felt a bit of shame at the first clinic. It was if we were doing something selfish so we went to another doctor and found support and acceptance. As to the pregnancy itself, our gay/lesbian friends did not relate to it, our families were still struggling to accept our relationship; we just did not feel as much validation as most parents do.” An issue of concern is lack of legal recognition of their family because the state in which they reside does not allow civil unions. “I have no legal rights as a parent,” Dee said, “and this is scary.”

As for the positives, Shelly said, “There are so many.” They then mentioned the ultimate joy of having a child, an enrichment of their lives, an emotional bonding, and a solidification of their relationship. “Our lives are child-centered right now, and we love it,” they said.

Looking at Nicole who appeared so at peace in Dee’s arms, I asked, “And what about her when she gets older?” Shelly said, “My worst nightmare is that she will be hurt by people who do not accept her.” Dee quickly added, “Yet some of my best traits have come from being hurt. We will raise her in love and nurture her self-esteem and hope that these will shield her.” The three of them represent all the finest in strong, healthy families. My wish, and I hope yours, is that Nicole will never experience hurt as a result of having two loving parents who just happen to be the same sex.

Figure 13-12

adversarial legal battle, such as mediation or a collaborative divorce (Thayer and Zimmerman, 2001), in order to focus on the children’s best interests.

Divorce is a different experience for children than it is for adults. They feel rejected, angry, powerless, lonely, and guilty. They did not ask for divorce yet are forced into being part of a battle between two people they love, according to the authors of a recommended book, *The Co-Parenting Survival Guide* (Thayer and Zimmerman, 2001).

Loyalty conflicts, sometimes flipping from one parent to the other and back again, are common for children of divorce. Children often conceptualize divorce as a fight between two teams with the more powerful side winning the home turf, and will root for different teams at different times. (Wallerstein and Blakeslee, 1989, p. 13)

Adolescents have a different experience than younger children; more challenges exist because of their multiple developmental changes. Negative effects can be alleviated by a positive parent–adolescent relationship (Hines, 1997). Adult children are frequently shocked and may react in extreme ways. “I could not believe it when my parents who have been together for 36 years said they were divorcing. I wanted to blame one or the other and force them to stay together. I finally realized that I was thinking only of myself and not about their well-being,” confided Diane. Hopefully, reading this section will motivate all children of divorce to make the effort to heal any old hurts.

How divorce affects children has been the source of numerous research studies (Fig. 13-13). More recent studies have focused on predivorce conditions as a factor in the outcome. Prior to their parents’ divorce, male and female adolescents had more academic, psychological, and behavioral problems than did their peers whose parents stay married (Sun, 2001). Children’s long-term welfare was linked to conditions both before and after their parents’ divorce (Furstenberg and Kiernan, 2001). How divorce affects children is still unknown. An important consideration is how an unhappy living situation impacts child development.



Figure 13-13 Children feel a keen sense of loss when their parents divorce.

There is no evidence that children need two parents in order to grow into healthy adults. But there is a great deal of evidence that children raised in an environment of tension, conflict, and abuse either reenact these behaviors in adulthood or become withdrawn and depressed and take on the role of the victim. (Forward and Torres, 1986, p. 260)

Even if tension, conflict, and abuse do not exist, an environment lacking an intimate love relationship between two parents isn’t an optimum one for children. They learn about relationships and marriages within a family, and those who witness an emotionally dead marriage are not gaining healthy messages about love.

The key to how well children do is in the hands of the divorcing parents. A challenge for all loving parents is to do everything possible to ensure that children do not suffer any more than necessary. Children are helped by realizing that self-esteem is not based on someone else’s love for you; instead, it comes from within. Watching parents cope positively with divorce teaches valuable lessons.

Just as people are not trained to be married, they have little or no education in divorce.

Society is making some efforts to correct this deficit by requiring postdivorce counseling and offering classes and seminars for divorcing parents and their children. Should divorcing parents be required to learn how to help their children cope? Ideally, individuals would seek all available resources because a well-handled divorce alleviates much of a child's pain. Leftover hurt from divorce continues largely because of parental attitudes and behaviors. Children whose parents are committed to doing a better job with their divorce than they did with their marriage are fortunate. Following are some important guidelines.

Leveling. Divorcing parents can make the crisis easier for their children by talking with them about the divorce. The child's age will influence the content of the discussion. Preferably, both parents will participate. Children then feel that both will continue to act as parents, and they are not as likely to take sides. At this time, and on a regular basis thereafter, children need reassurance that parental love continues and that the divorce, although painful to them, is the result of an adult relationship that did not work. Make sure that the message is clear that the children are not in any way at fault. The fulfillment of needs theory, discussed in Chapter 12, can be used with children old enough to understand. The marriage failed to meet individual needs, and neither parent is seen as the cause of the divorce.

Expressing. Intense feelings surrounding divorce are best vented. No matter how much it hurts parents to experience a child's pain and anger, such disclosures are to be freely encouraged. Divorce leads to a feeling of loss, and grieving is in order. Parents may feel a need to suppress their own emotions in front of a child. Being out of control is not recommended; however, an honest "I am scared sometimes, too" or "I hurt, too" can be beneficial.

Normalizing. It is best to keep life as normal as possible and avoid other major changes. Both parents can help by keeping children involved in activities and continuing to show an active interest. If a change is in order, you can make it easier by informing the children about it and listening to their input. You may need to be strong enough to hold fast against their objections.

Forming a positive parenting coalition. When divorcing partners do not get along, fathers especially tend to distance themselves (Doherty, Kouneski, and Erickson, 1998). Thus, being able to co-parent in a positive way greatly benefits a child. Developing a "temporary alliance for the purpose of accomplishing a project" is how Emily and John Visher (1988) described a parenting coalition. The Vishers, authors, therapists, and stepfamily adults, founded Stepfamily Association of America, an organization dedicated to educating and supporting stepfamilies. A coalition involves both divorced parents cooperating and staying involved in raising the children; later, it can also include stepparents. Even though a coalition approach is challenging and often frustrating, loving parents who want to serve their children best find that it is a wise investment of their time, energy, and effort. In fact, it may be central to the welfare of a child.

Do you have to be a good friend with the other parent? The answer is no. An ideal situation is to have a high friendship and low preoccupation with that person.

If being friends isn't possible, maintaining a cordial, businesslike relationship is highly recommended. A connection with an "ex" will always be there because of a common bond to a child; yet, creating emotional distance is healthy. Children are the real winners when their parents get along. A basic step that divorced parents can take is to agree on a general "want" for the children, such as "We *want* the children to be spared as much pain as possible" or "We *want* to do what is best for the children." In developing a working relationship as co-parents, use the following steps from the book *Between Love and Hate: A Guide to Civilized Divorce* (Gold, 1996).

1. Be businesslike and relate to each other as people do in the workplace. Focus on solutions and use teamwork to reach objectives. Use businesslike communications throughout the process.
2. Separate how you feel about your ex-spouse from how you relate to the person as a parent.
3. Focus on what the children need.

Other recommendations are to use open communication, describe desired behavioral changes, and do not assume. One parent's interpretation is no more correct than is that of the other parent.

What not to do. Parents can help children by eliminating all too common negative behaviors.

- *Do not* criticize the personhood of the other parent. Keep negative comments to yourself. Children perceive themselves as half of each parent, so berating your former spouse is hurtful and damaging to the child. "It feels like an arrow going right through me," said one child. If you are critical, direct your comment to the behavior of the person, as recommended for all criticism.
- *Do not* place a child in the middle of two warring camps. Children of divorce often speak of feeling torn. Parents add to the burden by setting up situations in which children are pulled in different directions: "Whom would you rather live with?" "Do you want to spend the holidays here or with your dad?" You may wish to offer a child alternatives, but be aware that having to make such decisions is difficult.
- *Do not* pump a child for information: "Who is your mom dating?" "How much money did your dad spend on you?" Putting a child on the spot is cruel.
- *Do not* use a child as a messenger. Closely related to pumping for information is to ask a youngster to relay a message: "Tell your dad that the child support check is late." "Ask your mom if she wants you to come this summer." The adults can communicate for themselves in an "adult" manner. If this seems impossible, communicate through the mail or through another person, not through the child.
- *Do not* add to a child's already weakened emotional state. "I am so unhappy. If only you lived with me, I would be much better" will only burden a child more. Or, if a child is angry at the other parent, do not increase the pain level. Instead, encourage the child to talk the problem

over with the person. If the other parent hurts the child by not being in contact or forgetting special days, listen to the pain and confine your comments to “I do not understand why this happens. Someday he or she is likely to regret not being a part of your life.” You may inwardly feel justified by a child’s resentment; however, do not feed the unpleasant emotional fire. Children do not benefit from feeling unloved and unwanted by either parent.

- *Do not* create more stress for the child. If finances are worrisome, for example, find a friend in whom to confide. Not recommended is to use child support and visitation as weapons in a struggle with the other parent. Paying support on time is in the best interests of a child. The reality is that only 48 percent of mothers receive the full amount that is due; the rest receive some, and others get nothing (Doherty, Koueski, and Erickson, 1998). Even though fathers typically pay support, noncustodial mothers bear equal responsibility. Spending quality time in a safe environment with a parent is in a child’s best interests; to deny this to get back at the other person is childish and selfish. Both custodial and noncustodial parents can deprive and damage children. Loving parents do neither.

Parents who work together to set up custody arrangements and a reasonable, flexible schedule of visits are helping a child. A key guideline is to do what is in the best interests of the child. A father asked me once, “What do you think of this idea? My wife and I have joint custody, and we are thinking of having our 3-year-old live with her for a year in Montana and then a year with me in Nebraska and just keep trading off.” My negative reaction was honest. Designed to make parents happy, it would likely make the child miserable.

Children typically appreciate being consulted about moving back and forth between households. The best course of action is to provide them with a number of choices that are acceptable to both parents and that do not indicate a preference for one or the other. The child’s input should be neither judged nor criticized. Because parental conflict and distress can impair a child’s adjustment, flexibility, congeniality, and cooperation are key elements in doing the best you can.

Ideally, both parents will remain actively involved in a child’s life. Consistency and dependability about spending quality time with a youngster are essential to well-being. If one parent has custody and the child spends the most time there, that person can keep the other parent informed about the child’s school progress, activities, health, and so on. If parents have difficulty in this area, a third party is the answer, and mediation is highly recommended.

Mediation is a form of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) that is offered in many states to parents who are divorcing or involved in other child custody issues as an alternative to the traditional investigative or litigation process. Mediation is an informal process in which a neutral third party facilitates discussion between parties to reach a voluntary, negotiated resolution. The decision to mediate is completely voluntary in some states, although mandated by the courts in others. A mediator does not resolve the issues or impose a decision on the parties. Instead, the mediator helps the parties to agree on a mutually acceptable resolution.

Parties have an equal say in the process and decide settlement terms, not the mediator. Benefits of mediation follow.

- **Is confidential:** All parties sign a confidentiality agreement.
- **Avoids litigation:** Lengthy litigation *can* be avoided. Mediation may assist the parties in avoiding the uncertainty of judicial outcome.
- **Fosters cooperation:** Mediation fosters a problem-solving approach. Parents are often more willing to follow parenting plans they have developed together.
- **Improves communication:** Mediation provides a neutral and confidential setting where both parties can openly discuss their views on the underlying dispute. Enhanced communication can lead to mutually satisfactory resolutions. A neutral third party assists the parties in reaching a voluntary, mutually beneficial resolution. Mediation can resolve all issues important to the parties, not just the underlying legal dispute.

There is a movement in family law whereby divorcing couples can sign agreements with lawyers to not go to court. More specifically, the process is known as Collaborative Family Law (CFL) and the agreement to not go to court is binding on the lawyers, not the couple. If one or both clients are unsatisfied, either may still march the dispute to court. They will, however, have to find new lawyers.

At heart, the CFL process seeks to develop consensus between the parties for a mutually acceptable settlement. The settlement can include the division of assets, spousal or child support, and/or the ongoing care of children (Direnfeld, 2006).

Single-Parent Households

Even though a family endures as long as its members are alive, its structure may be changed by circumstances. Any serious examination of families today includes the alterations brought about by death of a parent, desertion of a parent, or parental divorce. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 31 percent of U.S. households are single-parent households with children (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). Even though a larger percentage of these families is headed by women (26%), the number of single-father families is five times greater than it was in 1970 (Fields and Casper, 2000).

An expectation is that more than half of the children born in the 1990s will spend time in a single-parent home (Kantrowitz and Wingert, 2001). In fact, about 35 percent of Hispanic, 66 percent of black, and 20 percent of white children now live with one parent (Demo, 2000). The most common type of **single-parent family** is one in which a divorced parent has the children in his or her care. This type is also known as a *binuclear* family. Terms such as *custodial* and *noncustodial parents* are used to identify physical and, typically, legal custody. Joint custody is becoming more prevalent. In the United States, in at least 40 states shared custody is written into law (Gillenkirk, 2000). More fathers today are seeking their full parental rights. Research finds few differences between children living in either a single-mother or single-father family (Downey, Ainsworth-Darnell, and Dufur, 1998).

Individuals who do not live with their children are considered noncustodial parents. A study indicates that both sexes appear to have difficulty staying actively involved in their children's lives (Stewart, 1999). Still uncommon is the mother in a noncustodial role. Negative societal attitudes make the role difficult. Karen led a workshop for mothers without custody. Her objective was to encourage people to accept and empathize with women in this difficult role. "I have suffered because of others' opinions of me," she admits, "and I have some regrets. I do know that my relationship with my sons is loving and close, and I honestly do not think it could have worked out as well if all this had not happened the way it did." The acceptance of mothers as loving noncustodial parents will be a step forward. Perhaps a simple statement made by Irene will put this in perspective: "I did not give up my child. She just lives with her father more than with me."

Regardless of whether the custodial parent is female or male, single parenting is a challenge. "It is the hardest job in the world, no doubt about it" and "I feel I have to be all things to all people" are typical thoughts. Deciding to be the custodial parent requires objectivity and a great deal of thought. Too often, mothers assume custody just because society expects them to do so. An individual is wise to assess honestly what is in the best interests of the children. Of course, in cases of desertion or death, a parent has no choice.

Difficulties include the inordinate stress of trying to assume multiple roles and attempting to handle all the children's pain; one's own feelings of guilt, anger, and depression; time management; and finances. For women the latter is usually quite challenging.

A common concern of single parents has to do with the welfare of children without a same-sex parent in the household. In a comprehensive evaluation of research on this subject, no evidence was found for a benefit of living with a same-sex parent (Powell and Downey, 1997). An interesting study of African American children found that at lower socioeconomic levels, students in single-parent families actually scored significantly higher on academic tests than did those from dual-parent families (Battle, 1998). Having another caring adult to share the load is helpful; however, democratic discipline and other positive parenting strategies can be used effectively by one as well as by two parents. Support groups are major sources of help. Classes and seminars can offer practical advice and encouragement to parents floundering in their new (or old) role.

The benefits and rewards of single parenting can diminish the impact of the problems. Most parents without partners proudly acknowledge:

- Heightened self-esteem and feelings of pride in all the accomplishments of single parenting
- Close, meaningful relationships based on shared coping, emotional expression, and deep communication
- Self-respect and the pride of being self-sufficient
- Freedom to make solitary decisions on child raising

A study by Morrison (1995) showed many strengths of single parents, including flexibility and adaptability to change, less adult conflict and tension; and more warmth, cooperation, and cohesiveness.

Contrary to what is implied by the stigma of single-parent families, children can do extremely well. Ryan was described by a high school counselor as an outstanding scholar, athlete, and all-around student—one of the best-liked kids in his large California high school. He said, “I know of no other student, past or present, whom I would most like to have as my own child than Ryan.” This remarkable young man earned athletic and academic scholarships and graduated from Stanford University. In a letter of recommendation, his college baseball coach wrote:

I have never had a student athlete that I have been more impressed with than Ryan Turner. He has an enthusiasm for everything he does that is contagious. He proved to be one of the most, if not the most, exceptional young men I have ever been associated with in my 21 years of collegiate coaching. Ryan is first class in every respect!

Ryan, now in his thirties, added to his laurels by being the first player signed by the Colorado Rockies and then earned an M.B.A. from Harvard Business School. This fine young man, who could be described as the “product of a broken home,” was raised since age 5 by his single-parent mother Connie. Both son and mother deserve a great deal of credit (Fig. 13-14).

Parents without custody play a significant role in a child’s life. As indicated earlier, children want and profit from a positive relationship with both parents. Successful noncustodial parents make parenting a high priority. Showing your love and concern, while resisting a temptation to spoil a child, is highly recommended. The ones who do an excellent job get to know their children even better and often develop a closer relationship than they had before. They do not cause problems for the other parent; instead, they are cooperative and flexible and attempt to make the most of their special role.

Noncustodial parenting can be frustrating. “I want to be involved, but she will not allow it,” said one father in reference to his former spouse. “I have no idea what is going on with my two children except what they tell me every other weekend. I cannot get information from their father or their school,” said a frustrated mother. The parent with custody can do a great deal to encourage positive participation of a child’s other parent. Even without that positive involvement, children can do quite well. “Every child needs to feel that at least one adult is crazy about him or her” (Spezzano, 1992, p. 72).



Figure 13-14 Proud single-parent mom Connie and son Ryan after the College World Series game victory.

The love of both biological parents is even better. With all of its challenges and frustrations, single parenting is special and rewarding. Growing up in a binuclear family or with one surviving parent has its difficulties, yet the benefits can outweigh the costs. As with all of life’s challenges, individuals create their own realities.

Stepfamily Households

What is a stepfamily? Definitions vary even among the families themselves. The broadest concept of a **stepfamily** is a couple with one or both having at least one child from a previous

relationship. The child or children may or may not live in the household with the couple. One or both of the partners may have been married before. About 75 percent of those who divorce marry again (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). Divorce is the typical reason for the end of the former relationship, although stepfamilies also form after the death of a parent. A stepfamily also forms when a previously unmarried person with a child marries.

Stepfamilies come in many varieties, and the situation can be complicated. Both adults may have custody of children; one parent can have custody and the other can be a noncustodial parent; both can be noncustodial parents; or a stepparent may not have any biological children. The couple may add their own biological child to the existing family. As one who is familiar with the configurations, explanations are still difficult! If you are not yet married, you could join the increasing numbers of people who become stepparents in their first marriages. "Instant parent" is what they are sometimes called. Glen, a former student, wrote me a note: "Would you believe that I'm marrying a woman with two children? After hearing you talk about stepfamilies, now I am going to be in one!"

Men and women form stepfamilies for the same reasons they marry. They love each other, and they want to commit to a lasting relationship. For anyone considering stepfamily living, what is important is to take the time to "stop, look, listen, and learn." Preparing for a first marriage is important, and if you are going into a stepfamily, prepare, prepare, and prepare. Even though stepfamilies have existed throughout history, the 1990s produced more research than in the previous 90 years (Coleman, Ganong, and Fine, 2000). The studies unveiled the challenges, the strengths, and the ways to succeed.

For stepfamilies, a major challenge lies in overcoming society's image that spills over into how individuals perceive their family. What do you think when you hear the word stepmother? Most think of Cinderella or the wicked stepmother in the story of Sleeping Beauty. The image is powerful, and stepfamily stereotypes form early. A 3-year-old who had an excellent relationship with her soon-to-be stepmother asked on the day of the wedding, "As soon as you get to be my stepmother, will you beat me?" People presume that the stepfather will be cruel, the stepmother wicked, and the stepchildren poor maligned waifs. "To interact in the middle of such a dark cloud is crippling to many stepfamilies" (Visher and Visher, 1979, p. 6).

In one of the first studies of remarriage, **attitudinal environment**, or perceived support from the general society as well as specific people, was identified as a contributing factor to the success or failure of stepfamilies (Bernard, 1956). A favorable environment was found to be significantly related to family strength (Knaub, Hanna, and Stinnett, 1984). Greg pinpointed it well in a video program: "If you feel accepted from the outside, it helps you to accept yourself and the stepfamily from the inside." Support and involvement are needed from the extended family, including grandparents. "Grandparents are in an excellent position to build bridges or to build walls between stepfamily members" (Visher and Visher, 1982, p. 120). The educational system can play a major part in imparting accurate information about families and in encouraging an acceptance of the merits of all types of families (Pasley and Ihinger-Tallman, 1997) (Fig. 13-15).

Images of Stepfamilies

- A stepfamily is somewhat like a Cecil B. DeMille production—a cast of thousands (Westoff, 1977).
- The numbers of people involved and the subsequent myriad of relationships that are created contribute to the complexity of a stepfamily (Knaub, Hanna, and Stinnett, 1984).
- Being in a stepfamily ends one's fear of living a dull life. Stepfamilies that are born in pain can grow into joy (Adams, 1987).

Figure 13-15

Attitudes today are more accepting, and many adults and children perceive their stepfamilies as positive. Researchers are paying more attention to strengths. In 1989, only 4 of more than 50 self-help books contained a mention of the potential strengths of stepfamilies and (Coleman and Ganong, 1989); most research emphasized only the problems (Ganong and Coleman, 1996). Knaub, Hanna, and Stinnett (1984) were among the first to concentrate on the positives of remarriage and stepfamilies. Stepfamilies are strengthened in the same ways as other families are: communicating, showing appreciation, doing things together, handling conflict effectively, and perceived support (Knaub, Hanna, and Stinnett, 1984).

The stepfamily is a courageous and positive new family unit. It is not second-class. We are a different kind of family and we face different kinds of problems than other families. But we will survive and provide a second chance of happiness for millions of adults and children. (Getzoff and McClenahan, 1984, p. 142)

Because of stepfamily uniqueness, special challenges are best handled before they lead to insurmountable problems. Following are solid recommendations from the Stepfamily Association of America (2004), an organization that has educated and supported stepfamilies for over 20 years. Elaborations of the recommendations follow the list.

- Nurture and enrich the couple relationship.
- Have realistic expectations.
- Develop new roles.
- Express and understand emotions.
- Seek support and see the positive.

Expectations must be closely examined. People entering into stepfamilies may have unrealistic ideas, representing opposite ends of a continuum. Some adults believe that because they love each other, the stepfamily will automatically succeed. "I love you, and you love me, and I know the children and we will love each other, too." Realistically, love, if it develops at all between stepparent and stepchild, takes time and effort. Both may have to settle for a feeling of care and concern.

The belief that parents should love all their children equally and that children should love both parents equally is not a reasonable expectation for stepfamilies. In fact, such injunctions can produce guilt and may inhibit the development of a caring relationship. (Kelley, 1992, p. 585)

Stepparents are advised to stop worrying about whether or not they love their stepchild and focus on establishing caring, openly communicative relationships. In this environment, love can grow (Bloomfield, 1993).

The opposite expectation is a sour idea that stepfamily life will be the pits. Some parents begin by thinking, "I just know it is going to be a terrible struggle," and it is not unusual for children to say, "I know I will hate my stepparent." Neither is realistic. Stepfamily success is clearly possible but not guaranteed. A common mistake is expecting a stepfamily to be like a biological one. A stepfamily is different, and "different" does not mean deficient. In a workshop the question was asked, "How are stepfamilies different?" A loud male voice boomed, "Blood!" He meant that the biological basis is missing for the stepparent and stepchild. When this is acknowledged and not considered as negative, a positive relationship can develop. Other expectations include what "should" happen. For example, "Mike, you should love the kids; after all, they are mine," or "Mary, you should be like a real mother to my kids," and "Son, you should respect Mike because he is my husband and your stepfather." As with all forcing words, the reaction is usually negative. Expressing a realistic expectation as a "want" is healthier.

It is realistic to realize that stepparenting is not like being a biological parent; nor is it equivalent to adopting a child. The stepparent is likely to be resented at first, be somewhat feared, and be compared, usually unfavorably, to the biological parent. Stepchildren are apt to be jealous of a stepparent's place of affection in their parent's life. A former spouse can magnify these feelings and make the situation even more uncomfortable. A stepparent can expect to hear, "You are not my parent, and I do not have to love you." A suggested reply is, "I know I am not your biological parent, and you do not have to love me. I am your stepmom (or stepdad), and I would like to have a positive relationship with you." It is best to contain negative reactions and continue to let the child know that you are concerned and that you care (Fig. 13-16).



Figure 13-16

Within a stepfamily, each person assumes new **roles**, or behaviors within a status. The **status**, or position, of stepparent is considered to be an achieved one because it is earned by individual effort. Lack of training for biological parents is the norm, and only recently have the roles of stepfather, stepmother, stepchild, and stepsibling been examined. This lack of role definition is positive in a sense, because it allows the development of a role that fits the particular situation. If you are the stepparent of a 2-year-old whose biological father is dead, you will play a different part in the child's life than you would if you were the stepparent of a

child whose biological parents are divorced. In the former case, your role will be similar to that of the typical father. In the latter, your role would be as an additional significant adult in the child's life. Trying to replace the other biological parent is not recommended. Children do better if they are encouraged to have a tie with a biological parent that is different from their relationship with the stepparent.

The stepparent's role will vary depending on the living arrangements. Noncustodial stepparents can act more like just a friend, whereas a stepparent in the home will assume a parental role. Roles also differ depending on the age of the stepchild, his or her personality, and individual preferences. For example, a 6-year-old who is somewhat insecure may want a strong parental figure, whereas a strong-willed 16-year-old will prefer one who is flexible and friendly. A recommendation is to move slowly into a certain role. Stepparents who "come on like gangbusters" are usually resented. Shared or egalitarian marital roles work best. Resentment is likely when individuals feel that inequities exist. Research indicates that women in second relationships do a smaller proportion of housework than others because the man contributes more in this area (Sullivan, 1997).

Emotions are generally more intense, and often confusing, in a stepfamily. A full range of feelings is probable as people progress through stages of stepfamily life. People in stepfamilies are likely to have their share of hurt, disappointment, jealousy, fear, and anger. Freedom in expression and open communication are especially helpful. Empathy is sorely needed. Of utmost importance is for a stepparent to demonstrate warm and nurturing behavior as much as possible.

For a biological parent outside the stepfamily, acceptance of a new significant adult in your child's life is difficult. "When I heard my sons talking about their stepmother," one divorced parent said, "I wanted to scream that she is not any kind of mother to you. She is just the one who married your dad!" Stepparents may have jealous or resentful feelings toward the children's other parent. Keeping in mind what is best for the children is critical. Additional love and caring adults in their lives are bonuses. "No healthy stepcouple blocks a child from loving a natural parent" (Adams, 1987, p. 46). Additionally, no healthy parent blocks a child from loving a stepparent.

Jealousy and resentment related to a spouse's former mate are common. "I wish she would just go away," one stepparent said of her husband's ex-wife. "She calls and monopolizes his time, and what is so maddening is that he allows it!" Positive communication skills can enable partners to express these feelings in noncombative ways. And learning effective, businesslike ways of parenting with a former spouse, as discussed in a previous section, could alleviate these problems.

In a number of stepfamilies, as noted before, it is one person's first, not second, marriage. In a workshop, a young woman raised her hand and said, "I would like a different term instead of remarriage. This is my first marriage." Because of increased numbers of unmarried births, a high divorce rate, and marriages occurring at later ages, she has a lot of company. More than ever, first marriages today mean becoming an immediate parent. First-married partners in the stepfamily face some different challenges from those that confront remarried persons. Their emotional concerns may be acute as they deal with the role of stepparenting someone else's children when they have never parented before. Education and support are strongly advised.

A number of potentially stressful issues confront stepfamilies. Discipline and finances topped the list of identified problems for 80 stepfamilies (Knaub, Hanna, and Stinnett, 1984). Strongly recommended is to begin a new family system based on positive parenting principles and the style of democratic discipline described earlier. The use of the authoritative style, which is quite similar to the democratic style discussed earlier, is supported by research (Fine, Ganong, and Coleman, 1997). The authoritarian style is not healthy in biological families, and in stepfamilies it becomes a time bomb. Stepchildren do not usually accept a step-parent as an enforcer of limits, at least not initially. Having the biological parent take the lead at first is wise. Both adults working together and being supportive of each other is highly desirable.

If children move back and forth between households, binuclear family issues, identified in a previous section, need attention. A positive finding is that the proportion of children who report good relationships with their noncustodial fathers is higher in stepfamilies than in those where the mother does not have a partner (White and Gilbreth, 2001). The extended family becomes even more extended in that stepfamilies may have additional sets of grandparents and other relatives involved. How and where a stepfamily will spend holidays is an issue. Flexibility and compromise are necessary. In stepfamilies, people learn that holidays are not dates; instead, they are special times when family members can be together, regardless of the date. Other issues include who pays for what and for whom and in what ways are resources such as child support used; estate planning is of utmost importance. Developing a parenting coalition that includes stepparents is a wise investment of time and energy. Advantages are having more resources and people to deal with issues and events, less tension, more information about the children, less manipulation, and positive feelings for all concerned (Bloomfield, 1993).

A major challenge for stepfamilies is the higher divorce rate of 60 percent for remarriages (Marano, 2000). Various reasons have been suggested. "Dealing with stepchildren and ex-spouses, complex finances, the demands of two careers, and the need to meld two distinctive ways of doing things can create stresses that challenge the best of relationships" (Stuart and Jacobson, 1985, p. 230). Because of all the challenges, the interpersonal relations suggestions in this book are highly recommended.

One reason for lack of success is at the heart of all the others. When people in stepfamilies are neither educated nor prepared to meet the challenges, they find themselves hopelessly frustrated. "Stepfamilies must be built with more than good intentions, dreams, and hopes. Awareness, skills, and realistic expectations can provide a stable structure that permits the stepfamily to achieve its potential" (Einstein, 1982, p. 2).

In order to succeed, learning about this unique family type takes center stage. First, because stepfamily adjustment and integration take time, patience is encouraged. Books, workshops, classes, and programs about remarriage and stepfamilies are valuable educational resources. The Stepfamily Association of America, mentioned earlier, has local chapters throughout the United States. A step-by-step program manual for stepfamilies titled *Stepfamilies Stepping Ahead* (Burt, 1989) is an invaluable help, as are numerous other books and tapes available through the organization (see Resources at the end of this chapter).

Are the benefits worth the challenges? Thousands of stepfamily members would say they are. The “pluses” can include the following:

- Additional caring relationships within the stepfamily and the extended family
- Opportunities for learning and growing derived from other role models and from challenging situations
- Diversity of people and interesting situations
- Emphasis on deep communication and problem solving
- Focus on give-and-take, compromise, and sharing
- Living within intimate love relationships and happy marriages
- Satisfaction from succeeding in spite of challenges
- Joy from being cared for (and maybe even loved) by people who are not biologically related

Many stepfamilies do quite well. Family strength, marital satisfaction, and positive perceptions of family adjustment were found in an early study of 80 stepfamilies (Knaub, Hanna, and Stinnett, 1984). Within two or three years after stepfamily formation, most children adapt quite well (Demo, 2000). With no biological buffer of love, individuals can learn to care. Susie, a student, wrote that she had a stepfather and then added, “He’s several *steps* above what I had.” She described their relationship as very loving.

The absolute joy of being affirmed and loved by children who were not born to you is worth all the stressors along the way. Successful stepfamilies prove that human beings are capable of reaching out and developing long-term nurturing and loving family relationships that are not based on biology.

In tracing family diversity, a painful loss and ending can herald the beginning of a new and diverse type of family. The first is usually a single-parent or binuclear family. Life can be stressful and challenging, yet full of potential rewards. A stepfamily is possibly the next family type. Complexities and challenges are hallmarks of stepfamily life. Education and support can be of great help. Or a family can be diverse from its inception such as an adoptive family or one headed by same-sex parents. Asking the question of whether family structure matters, researchers found that processes—the relationships and what actually happens within families—are much more important than the type of family (Lansford et al., 2001). Perhaps, an author in a celebration of family diversity expressed it best:

More important for children’s development are close, involved relationships with a rich variety of family members and kin-support networks. Children are not disadvantaged by living in nontraditional family structures; rather, they are victimized by cultural intolerance and a reluctance to accept, embrace, and celebrate family diversity. (Demo, 2000, pp. 16–20)

If you know and value yourself, you are well equipped to meet the multiple challenges involved in parenting and developing strong families. The rewards are bountiful. Unique types of families that succeed illustrate excellent interpersonal relations. Such nourishing relationships are among the finest expressions of love (Reflect and Apply).

REFLECT AND APPLY**Reflect**

- ◆ *Of the positive parenting behaviors, which did your parents use? If you are a parent, which are you using?*
- ◆ *What do you think or know would be painful for a child when parents divorce?*
- ◆ *Think of both the possible challenges and benefits of being in a stepfamily.*

Apply

- ◆ *Watch a current television program or a movie with special attention to how families are portrayed.*
- ◆ *Write three tips for divorcing parents in regard to their children.*
- ◆ *Ask someone who has had stepfamily experience about both the positives and the negatives.*

LOOKING BACK

- A family is a primary social group and has tremendous influence on the lives of its members.
- A family can be defined as a relatively small domestic group (related by biology, marriage, or adoption) that functions as a cooperative unit.
- Today's society includes several types of families. Identified high-quality family characteristics describe loving, successful relationships.
- Parenting is a major responsibility for which no formal training is mandated. Even though educational resources are available, adults do not typically take advantage of them. Ideally, adults will become educated and make thoughtful decisions about becoming parents.
- Parental responsibilities are numerous. Love and trust are basic to a child's healthy development.
- Fathers are becoming more involved in caregiving; their role is considered as significant as the mother's role.
- Discipline, defined broadly as the entire process of guiding and teaching a child from infancy to adulthood, has many dimensions. Two styles, authoritarian and permissive, are not recommended. Families can benefit by using democratic discipline.
- Positive parenting behaviors include admitting mistakes, spending quality time with children, demonstrating warmth and affection, showing appreciation, emphasizing uniqueness and freeing children from the restrictions of stereotypes, allowing choices, and managing conflict successfully.
- The role of a grandparent is usually extremely enjoyable and satisfying, and relationships between grandchildren and grandparents are typically loving.
- Today's typical family is no longer the "Father Knows Best" variety. Dual careers characterize the majority of families. Diversity in families is represented by gay and lesbian households, adoptive households,

divorced households, single-parent households, and stepfamily households. Research has demonstrated that the quality of family relationships rather than the type is critical in the positive adjustment of its members. Children can flourish in any type of loving environment.

- A major challenge faced by many parents is helping their children cope with divorce. Recommendations, if followed, can make divorce easier on children. If two biological parents are alive, children are best served by positive experiences with both. Developing a positive parenting coalition with a former spouse is often difficult yet definitely in the children's best interests.
- A binuclear family is one in which children have biological parents in different households. Regardless of custody arrangement, both parents have responsibilities. Children who are single-parented can adjust positively, and adults can enjoy many rewards.
- A stepfamily consists of a couple and at least one child from a prior relationship. Stepfamilies are rapidly increasing in numbers. Usually formed as a result of death or divorce, they can be complex and challenging.
- Education and support provide invaluable help for stepfamilies. Overcoming a negative societal image, having realistic expectations, developing new roles and relationships, handling all kinds of emotions, and dealing with unique issues are major tasks of stepfamily members. The high divorce rate for stepfamily couples would likely be lower if education about and preparation for stepfamily life were the norm.
- Successful stepfamily relationships develop through application of personal and interactive skills and exemplify what this book emphasizes: positive interpersonal relations.

The family has a special place in thinking about close relationships. Family relationships are central to human existence, health, and happiness.

—Elaine Berscheid and Letitia Anne Peplau

RESOURCES

Family Service America (local agencies in most communities). (800) 221-2681.
<http://www.fsanet.org>.
 Parenting classes and help available through:
 American Red Cross
 Community colleges/university continuing education programs
 Cooperative Extension

Parent Effectiveness Training (PET)
 Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP)
 YWCA
 Divorce help for children and teens:
<http://www.childrenanddivorce.com>
<http://www.teencentral.net>
<http://www.kidspeace.org>

Parents Without Partners (local chapters in many communities). <http://www.parentswithoutpartners.org>
 Stepfamily Association of America, Inc. (provides education and support with local chapters in many communities and has books and resources for sale). (800) 735-0329 or (402) 477-7837.
<http://www.stepfam.org>