

## How To Be a Harmonious Family

**H**ave you noticed that some families seem to be harmonious most of the time; while other families seem to derive satisfaction from being in conflict? Talk with your children about harmony in the home. Is it desirable? Ask them, "Do you think we have a happy home?" Here are a few suggestions that could transform your home into a peaceful, tranquil place.

### Do Things Together As a Family.

Work on hobbies together. Read together. Watch television together and talk about what you have looked at.

Work together: Share the chores, clean the basement, plant the garden, help the neighbors, etc. Children need to discover the joy that comes from helping someone in need. Sister Loomis lost her husband a year ago. Brother Loomis always kept his place neat and trimmed. But Sister Loomis didn't have money to hire the work done. One day the family was talking about her and 12-year-old Tommy said, "Dad, why don't we just go over to her house and clean the place up and help her out?" So that's what the family did. They set aside a day to help Sister Loomis. They mowed the lawn, weeded the flower bed, cleaned the garage, swept the driveway, etc. Mom had packed a nice picnic lunch so they sat under a tree in the yard and enjoyed their lunch.

After about eight hours of work, the place was completely transformed. Sister Loomis was ecstatic with joy. They headed home with happy feelings. Dad said, "Let's stop for an ice cream treat." That night at worship time, Tom said, "This has been one of the happiest days of my life." But that's not the end of the story. "My neighbors asked me who the people were who cleaned up my place," Sister Loomis later related. "I told them that they were my church family." So the neighborhood learned something about Seventh-day Adventist Christians.

Play together: Budget time for

family fun. In planning be sure to get input from each member of the family. "Tammy, what would you like to do next Sunday on our family fun day? We could go to the park and you could play on the swings, or we could go for a swim and then hike up to the falls." Plan activities that every member of the family will enjoy. Outdoor activities are the best. Go out in nature and enjoy God's creation.

### Avoid Preaching and Moralizing.

Let Jesus be woven into your family conversation. Often ask the question: "What would Jesus do?" With full attention, listen to your children's ideas. Affirm good reasoning: "That was a thoughtful comment, Paul. Good thinking." Accept your children's feelings. You don't have to agree with what they say. Listen the child out, and give the feelings a name: "That must have been a big disappointment to you, Larry." Then listen.

**Blend Kindness and Firmness in Disciplinary Action.** Treat children with the same respect and courtesy as you would a stranger. The foundation of a solid relationship with our children is unconditional love. Probably the biggest challenge in parenting is to convey unconditional love when we must discipline. But love and discipline cannot be separated. "It is not necessary to resort to harsh measures; a firm, steady hand and a kindness which convinces the child of your love will accomplish the purpose." *Child Guidance*, p. 83. Gordon seemed to know what to do to make me mad. He kept right on tantalizing his three-year-old sister even after I warned him. I finally took him by the hand into the living room and sat him down in a chair. Then I gave him a good scolding. I raised my voice and said some things that I later regretted. This got his attention but it did not convince him of my unconditional love.

One of the hardest things in parenting is to control our feelings. It is so easy to overreact. Parents need to

stop, take time out, and think before responding to a child's misbehavior.

**Down-play competition.** But, you say, we live in a world of competition. When I was in school I was usually the last one chosen when the kids were choosing up sides for a softball game. I wasn't well coordinated and I know the feeling of being a loser. So my self-esteem was low. But, I eventually learned to excel in other things. If your child loses often, don't pressure him or her to win. Provide activities where he or she can succeed. Use words like: "I can see some improvement in your game." "Now you are on the right track." Dr. Kevin Leman says, "Whenever children fail, it's important to separate *what* they did from *who* they are." Make comments like, "[It's] too bad it didn't work out. . . . It's hard to remember everything all the time. . . . Maybe you forgot — I forget things too. . . . We need to teach our kids to have the courage to be imperfect." *Bringing Up Kids Without Tearing Them Down*, pp. 175, 176. We all fail and make mistakes. Help them learn from their mistakes.

**Put God at the Center of Your Family Life.** Budget time for and plan interesting daily family devotions. This will help to build a wall of protection around your children. We live in a world that is seductive, corrupt, and sinful. Regular morning and evening family worship will help build family solidarity. Avoid long prayers. Family worships can be interesting and enjoyable. Read a continued story, use nature items for spiritual object lessons, employ finger plays and motion songs for small children. Attend Sabbath school and worship services regularly.

**Let a Sweet Influence Pervade the Home.** "Above all things else, let parents surround their children with an atmosphere of cheerfulness, courtesy, and love. A home where love dwells, and where it is expressed in looks, in words, and in acts, is a place where angels delight to manifest their presence." *Child Guidance*, p. 146.