



## Let Your Values Guide Your Family Life

We all make thousands of decisions every day. Many of those decisions are based on habit. (That's the way I've always done it.) Some decisions are based on pressures. (If I don't get that done today I'll be in trouble.) Many decisions are based on our fears. (If I'm not nice all the time they won't like me.)

Some of that is inevitable. But if we are not careful, our life becomes like a ball bouncing frantically in a pinball machine. Our course can be determined by everything except the things that matter most: our values.

The trouble with values is that there are many operating at once. Consider the dad whose son got in trouble at school for pushing a playmate. The dad wanted his son to learn to respect his classmates. He wanted his son to become a good citizen. So he placed his son in front of him and chewed him out for his unkind school behavior. Of course the dad was doing something painfully similar to the thing that got his son in trouble. While talking of compassion he was showing insensitivity. We must model the values we hope to teach.

The challenge for family members is to keep the value of relationships at the heart of all decisions. Consider the importance of honesty. It is widely accepted that we should not deliberately deceive others. Yet the wise family member knows that there are many truths that do not need to be spoken. Sometimes kindness is more important than honesty.

Six values are commonly considered core values. Consider how you might implement and balance each of them in your family life.

**Human relationships.** People and our relationships with them are central. In the final analysis, many family decisions should be based on the question, "How will this choice affect my relationships with family members?"

**Dignity and worth.** Every person is more than a collection of behaviors. Each has inherent worth. "Does the person feel appreciated and valued by me?"

**Integrity.** Life is more satisfying when it is based on balance and trustworthiness. "Am I being true to my guiding principles?"

**Competence.** We appreciate when things are done well. "Do I strive for and appreciate excellence?"

**Justice.** We challenge unfairness and injustice. "Am I willing to stand up for those who are treated unfairly?"

**Service.** Life is based on helping each other. "Am I willing to help those in need?"

Not only can we thoughtfully apply such values in our own decision making, we can also acknowledge the use of these values by other family members. And we can initiate family discussions about how to apply our values to solving our family problems.

In such a discussion there is a temptation to challenge a family member's decision: "But that's not fair." The best discussions are not usually about coming to some right answer but about understanding each person's point of view: "I notice that you really value service."

Our family tries to celebrate the goodness we see all around us. That goodness takes so many forms! We hope to cultivate this tradition of being talent scouts in all of our family members. By so doing we can learn from the values used by all the people we know.

Families provide a unique opportunity for testing, learning, and teaching values. The greatest principles of human living are learned at home.