



## Working with Families

By Lavonne Roloff

**W**orking with families has been something to which I have dedicated my career of over thirty years. It has been fulfilling knowing that when there is a will there is the potential for change. When my children were small, there were a few playschools to choose from and fewer family resource centres. Most day cares were unlicensed and few standards existed. Since those days there have been many improvements and strides made to provide quality care for our children in a variety of venues. Now, parents are able to relax knowing that their child is cared for by qualified staff in a licensed day care. It

is possible to go to one of the many parent link centres in the province for information on parenting. For those families who need more support, there are about thirty-five home visitation programs in the province that provide support to approximately 3300 families (2012).

A family enters a home visitation program when their baby is zero to three months old and they may continue until their child goes to school. Home visitation is a voluntary program, and the primary referral source is the public health nurse who does the well-

baby visit shortly after birth. Families work on issues relevant to their situation. They know that they are not alone, and with their home visitor, they are building the foundation for a great life.

Increased research in the area of brain development shows the importance of the early years. Within the first three years of age, we have the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of children. We are able to better prepare the children for school and help them cope in life by teaching them to be self-aware and able to self-regulate. Ultimately, our aim is to raise healthy productive citizens who make meaningful contributions to our society.

Prevention and early intervention programs, such as those offered by home visitation and parent link centres, are the first steps in assisting families to reach the goal of having healthy, safe and secure children. The efforts of many early childhood and family studies professionals, social workers, home visitors and the government of Alberta (children's services) are making a difference as "together we raise tomorrow!" ■

*Lavonne Roloff is the provincial director of the Alberta Home Visitation Network Association.*



Alberta Home Visitation  
Network Association

Vol. 8 Issue 3

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### Be part of the family

AHVNA

9321 Jasper Avenue  
Edmonton, Alberta T5H 3T7

Phone: 780.429.4787

Fax: 780.429.4784

Email: [info@ahvna.org](mailto:info@ahvna.org)

Website: [www.ahvna.org](http://www.ahvna.org)

# Handling Unwanted Advice

By Elizabeth Pantley, Author of the No-Cry Solution book series

"Help! I'm getting so frustrated with the endless stream of advice I get from my mother-in-law and brother! No matter what I do, I'm doing it wrong. I love them both, but how do I get them to stop dispensing all this unwanted advice?"

Just as your baby is an important part of your life, so is he also important to others. People who care about your baby are bonded to you and your child in a special way that invites their counsel. Knowing this may give you a reason to handle the interference gently, in a way that leaves everyone's feelings intact.

Regardless of the advice, it is *your* baby, and in the end, you will raise your child the way that you think best. So it's rarely worth creating a war over a well-meaning person's comments. You can respond to unwanted advice in a variety of ways:

## Listen first

It's natural to be defensive if you feel that someone is judging you; but chances are you are not being criticized; rather, the other person is sharing what they feel to be valuable insight. Try to listen - you may just learn something valuable.

## Disregard

If you know that there is no convincing the other person to change her mind, simply smile, nod and make a non-committal response, such as, "Interesting!" Then go about your own business...your way.

## Agree

You might find one part of the advice that you agree with. If you can, provide wholehearted agreement on that topic.

## Pick your battles

If your mother-in-law insists that baby wear a hat on your walk to the park, go ahead and pop one on his head. This won't have any long-term effects except that of placating her. However, don't capitulate on issues that are important to you or the health or well-being of your child.

## Steer clear of the topic

If your brother is pressuring you to let your baby cry to sleep, but you would never do that, then don't complain to him about your baby getting you up five times the night before. If *he* brings up the topic, then distraction is definitely in order, such as, "Would you like a cup of coffee?"

## Educate yourself

Knowledge is power; protect yourself and your sanity by reading up on your parenting choices. Rely on the confidence that you are doing your best for your baby.

## Educate the other person

If your "teacher" is imparting information that you know to be outdated or wrong, share what you've learned on the topic. You may be able to open the other person's mind. Refer to a study, book or report that you have read.

## Quote a doctor

Many people accept a point of view if a professional has validated it. If your own pediatrician agrees with your position, say, "My doctor said to wait until she's at least six months before starting solids." If your *own* doctor doesn't back your view on that issue, then refer to another doctor - perhaps the author of a baby care book.

## Be vague

You can avoid confrontation with an elusive response. For example, if your sister asks

if you've started potty training yet (but you are many months away from even starting the process), you can answer with, "We're moving in that direction."

### Ask for advice!

Your friendly counselor is possibly an expert on a few issues that you can agree on.

Search out these points and invite guidance. She'll be happy that she is helping you, and you'll be happy you have a way to avoid a showdown about topics that you *don't* agree on.

### Memorize a standard response

Here's a comment that can be said in response to almost any piece of advice: "This may not be the right way for you, but it's the right way for *me*."

### Be honest

Try being honest about your feelings. Pick a time free of distractions and choose your words carefully, such as, "I know how much you love Harry, and I'm glad you spend so much time with him. I know you think you're helping me when you give me advice about this, but I'm comfortable with my own approach, and I'd really appreciate if you'd understand that."

### Find a mediator

If the situation is putting a strain on your relationship with the advice-giver, you may want to ask another person to step in for you.

### Search out like-minded friends

Join a support group or online club with people who share your parenting philosophies. Talking with others who are raising their babies in a way that is similar to your own can give you the strength to face people who don't understand your viewpoints. ■

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# What to Look for in Quality Child Care

By Teresa Lightbody

As mothers move into employment after the birth of an infant, one of their most challenging decisions is the choice of a child care centre for their infant, toddler or preschooler. The quality of care received at child care centres is essential for a child's well-being. Quality care is found to be positively associated with cognitive-linguistic development of toddlers and preschoolers with higher scores on language and cognitive tests. Additionally, enhanced child care quality is linked with happier, more securely attached and more pro-social children with fewer behaviour problems. It is further related to better cognitive, language and/or academic achievement in later childhood.

But what does "quality" child care mean? What should families be looking for when trying to find a quality child care?

Quality child care is typically defined as containing two aspects of quality:

1. process
2. structural

**Process child care quality** involves the nature of children's daily experiences in child care, especially the appropriateness of their daily interactions with non-parental care providers. (i.e. warm, sensitive and attentive behaviour towards children); the provision of curriculum, materials and activities to help facilitate children's development; and a physical environment that is organized and supports children's learning.

**Structural child care quality** includes child/staff ratio, group size and child care providers' training in early childhood development and education. Staff training in early childhood development is particularly important because, in addition to being associated with children's developmental outcomes, it is also related to process child care quality. This includes sensitivity to children's needs, frequency of

interactions with children and knowledge about appropriate educational activities for children.

Given the importance of structural child care quality, it is concerning that only a minority of parents are able to accurately report their children's day care teachers' level of education. A recent Canadian study found that parents overestimate the percentage of day care teachers who have advanced education degrees (i.e. BA) and underestimate the percentage of teachers with basic qualifications. Other studies found that parents tend to rate the quality of their children's care significantly higher than trained observers and are unaware that their children are not receiving quality child care.

Choosing the right child care centre for an infant, toddler or preschooler is a difficult process. Because having a secure, warm and stimulating learning environment is essential for children's current and future well-being, it may be of value to encourage parents to continually ask and inquire about the child care environment their children are attending. In-home support workers can also aid parents by helping them identify key aspects of quality child care they should look for (e.g. the training of child care providers). ■

*Teresa K. Lightbody is a PhD candidate with the Department of Human Ecology, University of Alberta.*

## LINKS

Finding Quality Child Care: A guide for parents in Canada at <http://findingqualitychildcare.ca/>

Childcare Resource and Research Unit at <http://www.childcarecanada.org/>

Alberta Government: Choosing Quality Child Care at <https://myhealth.alberta.ca/alberta/Pages/Choosing-Quality-Child-Care.aspx>

Alberta Government: Child Care Look Up at <http://www.child.alberta.ca/home/ChildCareLookup.cfm>

Alberta Government: Choosing Child Care: A guide to licensed and approved child care in Alberta at <http://humanservices.alberta.ca/documents/choosing-child-care.pdf>

# Top Tips for Changing Behaviour

By Lindsay Cummings

**T**here are hundreds of strategies for changing behaviours. The strategies and methods you choose depends on your child's needs and abilities, and your time and means to achieving a behaviour goal. Underlying reasons of *why* a behaviour is occurring needs to be considered when choosing an approach. The list of tips below, regardless of the child's level of functioning or underlying reasons for behaviour, apply to implementing your approach.

## Pick ONE specific behaviour you want to change

You can't change it all and you can't change it all right now. Pick the *one thing* that would make a difference in your daily sanity and forget the rest. For now.



## Work at it for at least two weeks

Once you decide on a new strategy, and explain it to your child so they understand the expectations (you'd be surprised at how many people forget this part), stick with it for a couple weeks. It may not seem like it's working at first because behaviour will typically get worse before it gets better, so you must stick with it, at least for a bit. After a fair go at it, if things are not improving, it is time to move on to the next strategy.

## Follow through

You absolutely cannot waiver on your consequence (or reward for that matter). If you are so tired you think your head may roll off, and your child does 'the behavior,' you must drag your lead body to follow through on the consequence. Every. Single. Time. I kid you not. This will be the game changer.

## If you have consequences, you must have rewards

You can't keep taking things away and/or just talking about the bad stuff. You need to give your child a reason to *want* to behave. Unfortunately, behaving for the sake of mankind just isn't intrinsic. Yet.

## Catch your child being good

Although you may be targeting behaviour X, it is important to acknowledge the other good behaviours no matter how small - "I like how you combed your hair; great job!", "You put your shoes on really fast! Wow!," "I really appreciate how you cleaned up your dishes; you sure are getting good at that!"

## Be specific

The examples above tell your child exactly what it is they did well. No more 'good jobs' or 'way to go.' You need to tell them *exactly* what it is they did a good job doing if you want to see it again.

## Don't power struggle

This is also a game changer. When you have given your instruction to do or stop doing something and arguing/whining/having a tantrum begins, DON'T ENGAGE. I'm telling you, your child will win every time. The only way to not engage in a power struggle is to ignore anything but the desired behaviour. Ignore the arguing/whining/tantrum. Walk away or lock yourself in the bathroom if you have to but *do not* open your mouth except to repeat your direction.

## Ignoring

If you are using ignoring as a strategy, ignore the behavior, not your child. Your child is separate from the negative behaviour. He or she is just a little person trying to figure out this world and deserves to be respected and loved no matter the behaviour. Sometimes separating the two is the hardest thing to do.

## Behaviour is communication

Kids don't behave badly for the sake of it. They don't wake up in the morning and scheme how to make your life more difficult that day. Behaviour is no different than talking; it's just harder to understand sometimes if we don't speak that language. Learn your child's language, and if you are struggling to learn it, then ask for help. ■

*Lindsay Cummings holds a degree in Child and Youth Care and Diploma in Disability Studies. She is supervisor of a Behavioural and Developmental Aide Program at McMan Youth Family and Community Services in Calgary.*

# Consider an Adult's Previous Learning and Life Experience



By Wendy Peverett

**A**fter working with families over the years, either with individuals, family units or in a group setting, I realized that I am not only working with the present family members – parents, children, siblings and perhaps grandparents – but also anyone who had an influence on the parent's learning journey. Perhaps this was an elementary teacher, the local librarian, a coach, a local businessman or a spiritual leader. I often wonder how learning was viewed by the important people in their lives: was it something that held a great deal of importance, were there different expectations between sibling or by gender, was it an investment or viewed as a waste of money/time?

What kinds of experiences did the parent have? Was the learning process something that was easy or a bit of a struggle for them? Did it bring back positive or negative feelings? Was it interrupted by a major lifetime event? Were they pressured to “do better than” someone else or compared to another sibling?

Often I ask parents I work with in family literacy to share simple things, such as how did they choose their child's name or did they know the story of where their name came from. You would be surprised the number of times I am told either there is some tradition behind the name or they are named after a relative or friend that meant something special to them. When I ask about their first memories of sharing a book or song with someone, many times there will be a sense of fondness or happiness that comes out in their voice. There have also been times when a veil of sadness or hint of pain is noticeable.

Parents bring a lifetime of experiences with them wherever they go. Whether these experiences were positive or negative, we, as educators, acknowledge them for what they are. They belong to them and to negate them as just something from the past or as a misunderstanding or with some confusion does not give them the respect they deserve. I know I don't want my feelings to be questioned - they belong to me, and me alone whether or not someone else thinks they are valid.

I try to remember when I am facilitating a group or working with a family that parents

- ***Want to learn what I have to share*** – what often motivates them is helping their children achieve more than they did.
- ***Need to see the practicality of what I am sharing*** – how will it help them right now, not in three years
- ***Want to be actively involved*** – understand the “how” and “why” as well as the “way to”
- ***Bring experiences with them into their learning*** – this can be a help or a hindrance, a blessing or a curse
- ***Focus on realistic problems*** – adults see a problem and want to work towards a solution
- ***Learn best in an informal situation*** – settings with rigid rules are not always conducive to learning
- ***Want guidance rather than being told what to do*** – they want the information that will help them, but they also want options on how they can use the information
- ***Need to be treated with respect and dignity*** – they do not need to be fixed

Keeping these in mind helps me be a better facilitator and makes a real difference on how I approach learning with the families I work with. By genuinely being interested in what they want to share with me, I learn as much from them as they say they learn from me. I also know that when my girls were heading out on their own personal journey, I heard my mother whisper to me, “Have you taught them well?” ■

Wendy Peverett is the literacy links coordinator at the Centre for Family Literacy at [www.familit.ca](http://www.familit.ca)

# Supporting Fatherhood Initiative

By Jessy Gray

The Supporting Fatherhood Initiative is a project supported by the Norlien Foundation and RBC Foundation. This initiative focuses on the important role that fathers play in their children's lives. Fathers who are involved in their child's life significantly impact the success of the child. Some of the researched benefits are

- Having both mother and father involved helps children to have higher self-esteem, better social skills and more success at school
- Children with involved parents also are less likely to experiment with drugs and are at reduced risk for teen pregnancy
- When dads are positively involved, children are better at dealing with emotions

Across Alberta there are three locations currently offering the Supporting Fatherhood Initiative: Cochrane, Edmonton and Lethbridge.

In Edmonton, Norwood Child and Family Resource Centre is the site for the Supporting Fatherhood Initiative. The program is called the Parenting in Partnership Program (or PiP). Families who participate in the program attend a 16-week group. The main areas of the curriculum are

- Sense of self and managing individual stress
- Relationship as a couple
- Relationship with our child or children
- How we were raised and how our own parents were raised
- Managing stress from outside the family and connecting with supports

The family is connected to a family support worker who supports the family through home visitation for a minimum of one year after the group is completed. Home visitation supports families in using their learning in home and community settings.

Dinner and child care are provided to the families for the duration of the group. Some of the feedback from participants who have attended include the following:

- "This group makes you feel like you are not alone. When I hear other dads' problems, it makes my problems feel more manageable."
- "Checking in each week allowed us to see the similarities in each other. Through the concerns that were shared, I was able to relate to the other dads and learn what I could do if that happened to me."
- "More peaceful ways to argue, problem solve."
- "This has built a community for me."

The Supporting Fatherhood Initiative is a significant factor to the success of families in Alberta.

If you are interested in learning more about this project please contact the sites directly.

## Cochrane

– Parent Link Centre: 403.851.2265

## Edmonton

– Norwood Child and Resource Centre: 780.471.3737

## Lethbridge

– Family Centre: 403.320.4232

*Jessy Gray is the project director of Norwood Child and Family Resource Centre in Edmonton.*



# What Imprint will you Leave Behind?

By Kathy Archer

I was in the middle of making supper when the phone call came. "Kathy Archer?" "Yes, this is Kathy." "Your son has been in an accident".

My heart fell to the floor. Before my mind could do the complete whirl of worst-case scenarios, the RCMP officer on the other end of the phone assured me that my son was okay. He had been in a mountain bike accident, and they were currently getting him off the hill, and I could meet the ambulance at the hospital shortly. His calm demeanour and encouraging voice left me convinced that things would be fine. Because of the way the officer handled a two-minute phone call, I approached the situation more rationally and positively.

I did not get the officer's name nor meet him. Yet how he handled the situation had an impact on me. It's made me aware of my own demeanour when delivering difficult news. Other people who have worked with our family have also made comparable impressions. Certain teachers worked especially hard with our children, not just to help them get good grades but also to help them reach their full potential. These teachers will have a special place in my kids' hearts forever. We have a dentist that our children have seen since they were old enough to go. Dr. Wing would make balloon art for them after their checkups. He talked to them as individuals and took an interest in their likes and lives. Even more remarkable was that he remembered all of that at the next visit. The kids all respect and look up to Dr. Wing. In many ways, he is a mentor for them.

When we work with individuals and families, we leave our legacy, our imprint, on them. Robert Galford and Regina Maruca write one of my favourite definitions of legacy in the book *Your Leadership Legacy*.

*"Your legacy is defined by how others approach work and life as a result of having worked with you."*

When we come into contact with a family, our intention is that they grow because of our work with them. We want them to gain new skills, new discipline techniques and greater understanding and awareness of their children so that they become the best parent they can be. The key to legacy is how do the families approach life as a direct result of working with you? What mark have you left behind?

Consciously determining the impact you want to have is an important part of our work. We may go into families' homes in a crisis situation or when we are ourselves are overwhelmed in our work or lives. In some ways we can be unconscious about what we are saying or doing, just getting our work done because there is so much more to do. Nevertheless, a simple remark or action, as you probably know, can stick with someone forever.

I remember one young mother, whom I worked with, was struggling to feed her children on time. We worked on strategies to help her be organized. Years later, coming into contact with her again, she remembered, and still used, a certain TV show that came on at noon to remind her to get lunch ready for her children. She chuckled that I'd taught her that; my long-ago intervention had had an impact. She learned it was okay to compensate for her learning disability with external reminders.

When you work with families, take the time to consider what impact you want to have. Do you want them feeling calmer and more at ease? Maybe you want your families to have more enthusiasm for life. In some situations you might be looking to have the parents feel more confident in their parenting abilities. When you know the impact you want to have, you can be more mindful of what will create that impact.

Your legacy is the lasting imprint of your work. The best way to do this is to be conscious about the impact you want to have. Your families will then remember you for what you actually want to be remembered. ■

*Kathy Archer ACC is a certified leadership development coach and owner of Silver River Coaching. She coaches leaders and organizations to grow a new kind of leader for a new kind of time. Kathy devoted 20 years to family support programs and as a leader of parent educators.*



## Raising Slow Food Kids

By Liz Sannachan

I am always on a quest to live a simpler life. I was browsing through a 'simple living' book when I came upon a wonderful concept with some great life applications.

I love cooking a good meal. There is something so grounding and comforting about giving the time and ingredients it needs to create something delicious and attractive.

Oh sure, there is a time for the fast food lane, when a quick fix is needed. We happen to live in a fast-paced world, and the immediate solution is often what we look for.

However, when raising children, we want to adopt a more 'slow food' way of being. Think about it. Who of us thrives in a high-demand, immediate, urgent, hurried environment? There are certainly times when this kind of response is needed, but as the main menu of our childrens' lives, this is far from healthy.

When we make a quality meal, we choose the ingredients carefully, possibly the freshest we can find, and wash, dice and slice them mindfully, thinking of how they will present in the end. A food processor makes quick work of things, but I hope you

would agree that seeing veggies in cubes, juliennes and diagonals looks a whole lot nicer.

With our kids, the ingredients relate to how our eyes light up when they come in, our respect, our hugs and kisses, family rituals and traditions, daily predictable routines like story time, cuddle time, interest in what interests them, meal times, outings... you know, the nice spice of life. There are some spices that on their own would seem unpleasant, but in the blend, have good value. Our children need these kinds of ingredients, too: limits, frustrations and tears mixed in with and supported by love, acceptance and guidance. Without these there would be no fullness to the end result, no depth to the flavour, no maturity.

Last, but not least in importance: slow food needs time. Our kids need time to mature and come to their full potential. They need our patience, our relaxing about the end result and our trust that having provided the optimal ingredients and practices, our kids will become who they are meant to be: adults who love themselves and treat others with love and respect. What more could we ask for? ■

*Liz Sannachan is a home visitor with Healthy Families program in Grande Prairie.*

# Parenting Resources

By Ilene Fleming

## Coming up

The next issue of Connections will focus on Infant Mental Health. If you would like to submit an article or resource for this topic, please contact the AHVNA office by January 30, 2014.

## Hearing from you

Connections is published three times per year by the Alberta Home Visitation Network Association. We welcome comments, questions and feedback on this newsletter. Please direct any comments to Lavonne Roloff, AHVNA provincial director, by phone at 780.429.4787 or by email to [info@ahvna.org](mailto:info@ahvna.org).

**Editor:** Carolyn (Carri) Hall, MA

**Contributors:** Lavonne Roloff, Elizabeth Pantley, Teresa Lightbody, Lindsay Cummings, Wendy Peverett, Jessy Gray, Liz Sannachan, Kathy Archer and Ilene Fleming

**Design and Production:** Don Myhre

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AHVNA

9321 Jasper Avenue  
Edmonton, Alberta  
T5H 3T7

Phone: 780.429.4787

Fax: 780.429.4784

Email: [info@ahvna.org](mailto:info@ahvna.org)

Website: [www.ahvna.org](http://www.ahvna.org)

On November 6th, I participated in the launch of a new resource titled “Healthy Parents Healthy Children” which was created and distributed by Alberta Health Services. Every parent wants to do their best to raise a healthy child, and the resources launched will provide support and guidance for families.

Although I work as an early childhood professional, I was delighted to be asked to participate in the launch as a parent, because being a parent brings a different sense of responsibility as well as joy. Since my daughter Olivia was born, almost three years ago, I’ve experienced enormous growth as a parent. I’ve also been bombarded with plenty of advice and opinions (sometimes unsolicited and even contradictory!) about how to parent. I had no idea just how complex the parenting role would be. So, it’s wonderful to have this trusted source of information to support me and also to share with other parents in my professional capacity.

The resources launched include a website ([www.healthyparentshealthychildren.ca](http://www.healthyparentshealthychildren.ca)) and two comprehensive books: *Pregnancy and Birth* and *The Early Years*. I like that parents can go online and search for information whenever we need it. For instance, I can find out how to encourage healthy eating or good sleeping habits and what to do to support transitions that our whole family experiences as Olivia grows.

The books are comprehensive and cover topics I hadn’t even considered, such as when should we start flossing our children’s teeth. I love that there are pictures, quotes and suggested activities to support our daughter’s next stage of development.

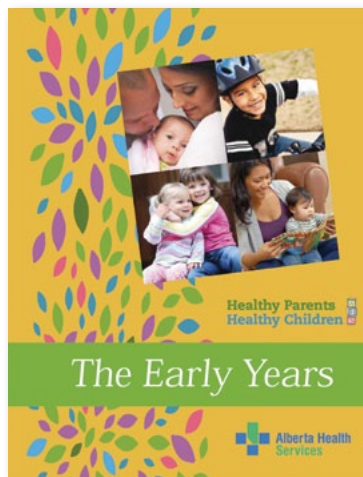
It’s good to know that if I have a concern about Olivia’s development or if I need help, there is a list of additional resources! I can find out what to do and where to call. This information can be found in the books, under the section “Where to go for more information” and [online](#) as well.

And, I am so happy that there are reminders for parents to take care of ourselves. Sometimes this is the hardest thing to do,

but healthy parents are a key ingredient for healthy children. And, in order to do our best, we all need support as parents.

As early childhood professionals, we each have a unique opportunity to connect parents to resources that help them provide and care for their child’s healthy development. I encourage both parents and professionals to check out these new resources and share them with others in the community. Helping parents feel connected and supported is a wonderful way to support children. ■

*Ilene Fleming is the director of Community Building and Investment, Children and Youth, Success By 6® United Way of the Alberta Capital Region*



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