



Provincial Director's Message

By Lavonne Roloff



Alberta Home Visitation
Network Association

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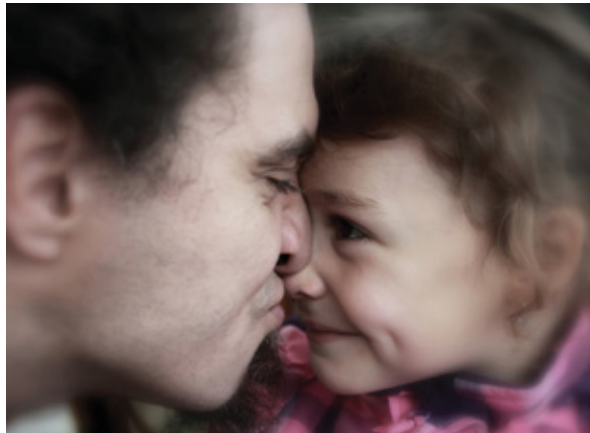
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The past two issues of *Connections* have focused on healthy parenting strategies with a goal of strengthening families. Over the past thirty years, Nick Stinnett and John DeFrain have researched families all over the world to discover what makes them strong. In 1986, they published *Secrets of Strong Families* which outlined the findings from their research. They identified the following six strengths of strong families:



- Commitment to each other
- Appreciation and affection for each other
- Positive communication
- Enjoyable time together
- Spiritual well being
- Successful management of stress and crises

In 2007, DeFrain (with co-author Lisa Jasa) wrote *Family Treasures: Creating Strong Families*. This book further explores the concept of creating a strong family and indicates these traits are still important for families. DeFrain provides inventories and family activities that reinforce each of the six strengths.

Dolores Curran wrote *Traits of a Healthy Family* based on research gathered from professionals working with families. She found the number one trait is that a healthy family communicates and listens to one another. Curran identifies the following

traits of a healthy family: affirming and supporting each other, respecting others, having a sense of trust, sharing time together by playing and interacting, sharing responsibility, teaching morals, developing rituals

and traditions, having a spiritual core, valuing service to others and seeking help when needed.

Effective communication is essential in building all relationships and especially within the family. ■

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



BREAKING THE CYCLE OF HURT: Isabelle's Story

By Marianne Dickson

Isabelle (not her real name) was a single mom of two young children who were two and four years old when we first met. Recently divorced, she was the sole provider for the family. The children's father refused to support the children financially and was inconsistent in his emotional support. He frequently made plans to see the children, but often failed to follow through. This, combined with Isabelle's own childhood history of horrific abuse left her and the children in a vulnerable position. While Isabelle was able to identify the issues affecting her family, she lacked the skills, confidence and sense of self-worth to make the changes needed to successfully parent her children. The will, love and desire were there, but the capacity and resources were not.

Isabelle sought the support of Wild Rose Community Connections' (WRCC) "First Years for Families" program in January, 2000. She built her parenting skills and connected with community resources to assist meeting her children's needs. One significant barrier to Isabelle's success was that she never received any counselling about her abuse at the hands of her family. Her need to be loved and accepted by her

family left her unable to address the effects their abuse had on her as a person and as a mother. She feared her children would not have the happy, healthy childhood they deserved because she did not have the experiences of how to be a good mother.

The First Years for Families program helped Isabelle research some counselling options in her community. Some obstacles she faced were finding a skilled local therapist to assist with her specific issues; finding funds for intensive therapy; and having the support systems in place to help her manage the emotional fallout that comes with dealing with the traumas. It was a difficult journey.

Isabelle opted for EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) therapy, a highly respected and effective process specifically for treating trauma. This treatment, however, was not available in her rural community, so the cost for transportation to and from Calgary was one barrier. Additional barriers were the cost of child care and of treatment. Isabelle was able to work with her meagre budget to put some towards the cost of treatment, but was in no position to pay the full amount. WRCC not only contributed funding, but also sought the support of service clubs to support her healing.

The end result—a healthy, happy, confident, capable and achieving young woman who went on to attend post-secondary education, broadening her employability and earning potential. This resulted in having the means to meet her children's needs without accessing emergency funds for food, utilities and rent. Her children benefitted from having a mom who could focus on and help them thrive in a stable and safe home. The children, experiencing healthy relationships, are now less vulnerable to being victimized or continuing to be a part of an abusive family legacy.

Isabelle's children who are now in high school, participate in sports and clubs and volunteer in their community. They are achieving in their academics and have plans for post-secondary education. They have a very promising future as healthy contributing members of our community who will likely go on to raise happy, healthy children of their own. Isabelle is so proud of her children. She has successfully broken a cycle of hurt.

Marianne Dickson is executive director of Wild Rose Community Connections in High River.

After completing the in-home supports program, Isabelle wrote a poem and shared it with us.

She has given us permission to share this as a way to promote hope and well-being in others.

Who

Who has lived in a world of darkness,
Who is now living in a world full of sunshine.
Who has lived without the love of a mother,
Who is now a mother with endless love for my children.

Who has lived life as a child in fear,
Who has lived life as an abused child,
Who is now living life as a healing woman.
Who has lived life as a loner growing up,
Who is now living life with a loving circle of family and friends.
Who has lived life full of hate and remorse,
Who is now living life full of love and forgiveness.
Who has once lived life wanting to die,
Who is now wanting to live life to its fullest.
Who has lived life as an unwanted child,
Who is now living life as a wanted woman and mother.

Who has lived life with no purpose,
Who is now living life with the purpose of being a loving mother and friend.
Who has lived a life of shame,
Who is now living life no longer in shame, but proud of my accomplishments and a bright future ahead.

Who is no longer just "Who."
Who is now finally living life with an identity as "ME" as Isabelle.
I am glad to finally have discovered myself, and I am looking forward to a wonderful life full of growth and adventure,
With the two most inspiring people in my life, Trey and Julia.
May we grow as individuals but united as one.

The Most Valuable Training



By Jody LaGreca

Over the past 20 years I have been employed in various positions within the “helping” profession. I have over six years of university courses and attended countless workshops. So when, in a job interview, I was asked what training had been the most valuable to me, I paused to recall all of my experiences. One event stood out for me, and it was not a course, workshop or professional development.

From the day my son was born, he never slept for more than ten minutes at a time. He cried constantly. Nothing that I did could soothe him. I read every book or article that I could get my hands on. I called relatives for advice. I took him to different pediatricians. I was told that it was “colic” and that it would go away. It did not. Months passed, and I lived in a napping world where there was no distinction between day and night. When he was six months old, I had to return to work. A few weeks after returning to work, I was doing a terrible job and hallucinating from lack of sleep. Finally, my body had enough, and I collapsed at work.

My supervisor was reluctant to allow me to return to work until I had my home life under control. This meant I needed to fix it or else. Over the last few months I had exhausted what little family and friend support I had. It was time to admit that it was more than I could handle. I summoned the courage to ask for help.

After my tearful call, several ‘visitors’ from various helping professions darkened my door. I was treated with suspicion and detachment. I was asked many questions, my home was inspected and my child was checked for abuse. Reports were filed, and I received a letter stating that I did not pose a threat to my child. I was never given any advice or resources. No one ever asked how I was doing or how they could help. At the end of it all, I was left desperate and alone with my screaming child. ***I will never forget how that felt.***

Thinking back to this prolific experience, I knew this was not what the interviewers meant when they asked me what was my most valuable “training.” However, I felt that if they did not recognize the importance of my experience they were not the type of organization that I wished to work for anyway. So I decided to share my story, and I got the job.

I am lucky, in a sense, to have survived my experience because now I have an awareness of what it feels like to be the one needing help. As a support worker, I meet people when they are at a vulnerable place in their lives. Despite this overwhelming responsibility, I have found that I can make a positive difference as long as I apply my most valuable skill—empathy.

Oh, and hoping that the reader of this shares my passion for empathy and therefore is still wondering how it all turned out...soon after my son became very ill and fell into a coma. He was diagnosed with a serious medical condition, and we finally got help. He is graduating this year, and we are doing fine. ■

Jody LaGreca is a certified teacher. She is currently a facilitator with the St. Paul Family Literacy Program.

Supportive Relationships

By Mary Stewart

"How we create and support relationships for and with parents is unique."

Google the word 'parenting' and you get over 35 ½ million hits; for 'positive parenting' you get over nine million. There are magazines, websites, books and television programs that all advise how to be the best parent you can be. This can be overwhelming and often confusing. As home visitors, we are in a unique position to help parents and families make sense of this.

Positive parenting starts with developing three important relationships:

- the parent relationship with self
- the parent relationship with child(ren)
- the parent relationship with other significant adults



Relationship with self

The first relationship is the one parents have with themselves. Parents are flooded with information about nutrition, sleep, parenting, play, etc. To figure out how to make use of this information, they need to develop a trusting relationship with themselves. This means developing a level of self-awareness and having the ability to be self-reflective and say, for example, "Right now I am tired; I need some sleep." Or, "I think my baby needs my attention right now even if this book says 'let him cry.'" Parents can be full of self-doubt and get pressure from others or the media that tell them they need to parent in a certain way. For example, "My sister told me her son was sleeping through the night at five weeks, so what's wrong with me and my baby?"

Developing self-trust will increase the parents' confidence and help them navigate the complex decision-making experiences that are part of parenting. As a home visitor, we can help parents by asking simple questions such as, "What is your instinct? What is your gut telling you might be good for you and your baby?"

Relationship with child

Second, we can support parents to build a relationship with their baby or young child. As we know, babies do not come with instruction manuals and sometimes parents need support to build this relationship. Ask parents questions such as, "How do you know your baby is tired? What did you notice?" This helps parents build the capacity to read their baby's cues and non-verbal communication. Understanding what these cues mean enables the parent to respond in appropriate ways to meet the baby's needs. This 'dance of attunement' builds the foundation for a strong parent-child relationship that lasts throughout life. It also builds the strong neural pathways that are the basis for all development and learning.

Relationship with other adults

Third, we can support parents to have a responsive, supportive relationship with other adults or a network of adults. For some parents, this relationship may be with their spouse or partner. For others, it might be with their mother, neighbour or close friend. This is someone with whom they can be themselves and share challenges and joys of parenting and the dance of attunement. We all learn within the context of a caring supportive relationship. Parents need that relationship to be able to talk things through, to process and make sense of all the parenting information that surrounds them and to process and discuss the relationship they are developing with themselves and with their growing, changing baby.

A trusted relationship can also be developed with the home visitor or a consistent service provider: public health nurse or someone at the parent link centre. Parents may respond more readily to information, suggestions and advice within the context of a trusted relationship. How we create and support relationships for and with parents is unique. People develop within the context of relationships. As home visitors, we can nurture these important relationships. ■

Mary Stewart, ECD, BSc, Dip. Ed, MA, is the manager of the Early Years Continuum Project, Success by 6, United Way, Alberta Capital Region.



Teaching Children to Take Responsibility

By Kathy Lynn

One of the first parenting courses I took was based on the teachings of Rudolf Dreikurs who stated, “Never do for a child what he can do for himself.” Today, forty years later, this belief remains with me through all the workshops, courses, keynotes and seminars I have presented and attended.

If you want your children to grow up to be capable young men and women, able to take on the challenges and responsibilities of adulthood, you need to give them opportunities to develop the skills they will need. Having your children do for themselves whatever they can is a reasonable and responsible parenting choice.

But, what about when Joey tries putting on his sweater and it’s inside out? And once he’s figured that out, he then gets the buttons mixed up. If we take the sweater from Joey and reverse it, and then help him to get it on with all the buttons lined up correctly, what are we teaching him? That he can’t figure it out for himself; that he needs you to save him from his struggles. Soon he may just wait for others do for him what he could do for himself. When you

do everything for your kids, they become increasingly inept. Down the road, they may become the young adults still living at home, unable to find a job. Is that what you want?

Or, what about when Lucy is working to get into her shoes and taking what seems like forever, and you’re in a hurry? Being busy and rushed, you find it frustrating to allow Lucy time to get into her shoes. In the short term, it’s easier and faster if you do it for her. But, wouldn’t it be better to rearrange your schedule so that Lucy can start her task earlier, allowing her the time she needs to look after herself? When you help in this way, Lucy can learn to plan her life by building in the time she needs to accomplish her tasks. She’ll learn she can get into her shoes by herself, when you just leave her to it.

We need to let our kids struggle. That’s how they grow and learn. They learn how to tackle the task at hand and persevere until they get it. They also learn that you have faith in their ability to take on challenges and look after themselves. It’s a great message.

Another way we deny our kids the chance to grow up is when we fix their problems.

At bedtime, nine-year-old Juliette suddenly remembers that she needs to wash her gym clothes before morning. She could get up early and do her wash or simply wear her dirty clothing dirty. But, in too many cases her mom says she will do it for her. Or, ten-year-old Lucas forgets his lunch so he phones his dad at work to ask him to get it for him. Dad can leave work and bring the lunch to school, or, he can offer sympathy and say to Lucas, “I’m sure you can handle the problem.”

Our children are constantly learning. When we let them do for themselves, we are giving them an amazing gift. They become increasingly independent, are able solve problems and take responsibility for their own actions and behaviours. They also learn we have faith in them and will support and guide them, and we will let them take charge of parts of their lives when they are ready.

These kids will be the leaders of tomorrow and tomorrow needs strong leaders. ■

Kathy Lynn is a parenting expert who is a professional speaker and author of [Who’s in Charge Anyway?](#) and [But Nobody Told Me I’d Ever Have to Leave Home](#). If you want to read more, sign up for her informational newsletter at www.parentingtoday.ca.



Leadership Starts at Home

By Kathy Archer

Much is written about leadership in organizations, politics and even in communities. Yet leading starts at home, with your family, primarily as parents with your child(ren). What does it mean to be a leader in your home and with your children? It requires you to recognize your role, become clear on how you want to lead and be aware of the impact you want to have on your children.

Your role as leader

Just as a teacher stands at the front of the room, a boss at the head of the table or a spiritual leader at the pulpit, a parent is placed ahead or in front of their children, not only to guide them, but also to lead the way. You are not your children's friend or their peer, you are their parent, their leader. This role is a big responsibility. Think for a moment about that. Your children look to you to inform them, teach them and provide guidance. And as much as they resist, challenge and argue with you, what they are really doing is testing your leadership, asking you to stand firmly as head of the family and lead the way.

Your job in leading

What does it mean to lead? It requires a conscious effort to set the vision and direction of a team. What is the vision and direction of a family? Herein lies part of the problem. We don't often decide what our direction is within families. Your vision might be to have a close-knit family even as the children grow older. Or, it might be to have children attain a high education or be world travellers. Other families vision strong values such as giving back to their community, honesty above all else or taking care of the environment. Some families will have mission statements or mottos such as, "A family that plays together, stays together."

Your Actions

Once you have identified where you want to go, how will you get there? If you feel it is important for your children go to post-secondary training, you will place a high value on school routines as they grow up. You might institute a clear homework policy in your home and be very active in their schoolwork and in contact with their teachers. If you choose honesty as a path you want your children to follow, you will role model behaviours and actions related to this every day. You will likely take it even one step further and have conversations with them not only about their honesty, but

also where you have struggled to be honest and what has helped you stay on course.

Your impact

Look at the leaders in your life that have had a positive impact on you. Maybe it is your boss, a teacher, coach or your own parents. What is the impact they have had on you? Do you respect them? Do you trust them? Do they guide you? How do they do that? Reflect on how their words and actions have affected you. Everything we do in life has an impact. Just as when a pebble dropped in water has a ripple effect, everything we do with our children affects them. Choose your words and actions carefully to ensure you have the effect you desire.

Your choices

Leading your family requires you to be clear on the direction you are going with your family and the impact you want to have. Leadership as a parent means standing up, pointing the way and encouraging and supporting your children in that direction. Take time to consider this role carefully and recognize how important it is. ■

Kathy Archer ACC is a certified leadership 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 leading parent educators.

Four Keys to Conscious Communication

By Vince Gowmon

Even though we communicate all the time, most of us have never received any training or education on how to communicate. We fumble our way through many messy conversations and relationships without the skills gleaned from being a student of conscious communication.

Being a student begins with knowing that we communicate not only with our words, but also with our movement and energy. A slight shift in our body language can convey a new message. And our energy—how we are being—can create subtle ripples of influence that are intuitively received by others and impact the tone of our words.

We become conscious communicators when we are aware of our words, body language and energy in every interaction. Being aware means being present to, and curious about, how we express ourselves, and the impact we are having both on individuals and the whole (energetic space). We take greater responsibility in our relationships by owning our part in any conflict, and celebrating new milestones of joy and success.

Connection ~ The Heart of Conscious Communication

"May your heart be like a lake... with a calm still surface and great depths of kindness." - Lao Tzu

To practise conscious communication, our words, movements and energy must be in service of nurturing connection. Connection is the passageway between individuals through which the various forms of self-expression travel. The wider the passage is, the easier, more fluid and fulfilling the discourse. The more the passage constricts, the harder it is to reach the other person (they tune out or defend). Being a conscious communicator means being deliberate and intentional in how we

express ourselves so that we nurture our connection and the lines of communication.

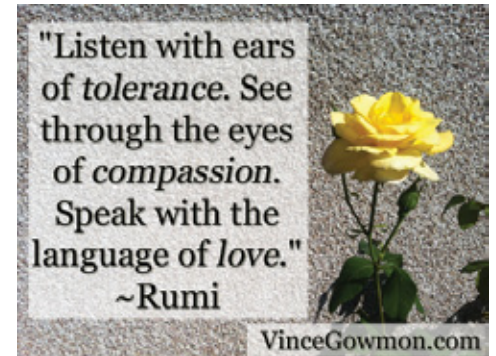
Here are four key ways you can nurture and sustain your connection with others.

1. Speak Calmly: When we raise our voice or react to what others are saying, we initiate conflict. We can avert much conflict simply by staying calm. It is the safety created by our calmness that keeps the space of connection open. Taking deep breaths is a great way to stay grounded in your body and maintain a calm tone. Identifying the underlying need or deeper value trying to be expressed by the other will also help you to stay calm. In other words, looking for the positive and seeing through the eyes of empathy.

2. Speak Slowly: Speaking fast is often a sign of being ungrounded, nervous and, as a whole, disconnected. When someone speaks fast, it often feels like they are talking right through us. By pacing ourselves we create room between our words so that each is more easily received. It's in the space between that we not only hear the other's words, but also connect to the human being behind the words.

3. Use Brevity: Speaking has more impact when it is short and to the point. The longer our sentences are, and the more we speak at one particular time, the less engaged the other will be. They will begin to drift away. Be conscious of your balance of dialogue. Be aware that you are listening as much as you are speaking. When this balance gets tilted too much to one side, you will lose your connection and desired impact.

4. Pause: Conscious communication is not just about the art of sharing, but also the art of receiving. It is very tempting to want to continuously fill in space, especially when there is a pause after you finish speaking. Let this pause settle in. Allow others a moment to digest what you have said and compose their thoughts. By speaking calmly,



slowly and with brevity you will find it much easier to hold the empty space that lies between your words and theirs.

Getting Started

While these four keys are simple, they may not be easy to practise at first. We have a lifetime of habitual patterns to overcome. To make things easier, the next time you are about to enter a conversation, choose one key element to practise. Take a moment to imagine what it would look like for you to play with this in your discourse. Another thing that may help is to share this article with the important people in your life. Each person can talk about what keys they'd like to play with more, what it would look like to incorporate them in the communication and how the keys can serve the relationship.

Know that it will take time and patience, but soon you will find that these simple keys have a powerful influence in shifting the dynamics of your relationship towards greater positivity and success.

Vince Gowmon is the founder of Remembering to Play Events, and is a certified professional life coach trained through one of the world's top accredited coaching programs, The Coaches Training Institute, and their leadership program. Vince leads keynotes and playshops for organizations, conferences and communities on topics such as leadership, communication, creativity, community engagement and play. His events are fun and interactive, leaving people inspired and with practical tools for work and life. For complete information on Vince and his services, please visit www.vincegowmon.com.

Coming up

The next issue of Connections will focus on **Working with Families**. If you would like to submit an article or resource for this topic, please contact the AHVNA office by **October 26, 2013**.

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.

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Together we Raise Tomorrow

By Lavonne Roloff

The Alberta government has embarked on a province-wide initiative called “Together we Raise Tomorrow” to develop “an Alberta approach to early childhood development.” This endeavour is under the direction of Premier Redford with the Honourable Dave Hancock providing guidance to ensure the goal is accomplished through the Alberta Human Services ministry in collaboration with the ministries of Education and Alberta Health Services.

The Children First Act will provide a measure with which to develop policies and ensure that children’s needs are kept at the forefront.

In addition, there will be a focus on

- a healthy start for children
- children realizing their full developmental potential when they enter school
- parents providing nurturing and stable environments for their young children
- safe, supportive communities for children to learn and grow and thrive

We are fortunate to be in a province that recognizes the importance of ensuring that Alberta’s children will have the opportunity to be safe, secure, educated and healthy. This will be accomplished through an integrated system.

Albertans have the opportunity to provide input on how to help young children reach their full potential and ensure the right tools are in place to support families. You can offer your suggestions, ideas and comments at www.socialpolicy.alberta.ca.

Take time to participate in this important discussion. Our children are our legacy.

Ways to Encourage Communication with Families

By Patty Bunker

Communication tools that work

- be consistent and follow through
- follow your own rules
- give clear answers
- give clear, direct instructions
- give honest answers
- provide clear expectations
- listen to your child
- recognize children’s feelings and acknowledge them

Parent gifts that last

- Support
- Empowerment
- Boundaries and expectations
- Constructive use of time
- Commitment to learning
- Positive values
- Social competencies
- Positive identity

Source: Bunker, P. (2005). *Parenting Partners: Practical Tools for Positive Parenting*. Family Leadership Connection: Fresno, California www.familyleadershipconnection.org.



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