



Carmelite Spiritual Center

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Life is Worth Giving

TEACHER OFFERS SPIRITUALLY HELPFUL GUIDE FOR PARENTS

by Fr. Kevin Shanley, O.Carm.

At times a person's best accomplishment may simply be the answer to the challenge of another. A recent work explained as go-between guidebook for parents and grandparents with children, is a direct and excellent result of answering a challenge.

Carolyn Deckelman, a teacher and librarian, has been working for some two decades with books and children at a grade school in Louisville, Ky. Her lively comments on both books and children in discussions at her home, rather contrary to the supposed conventional wisdom of the present time, brought a challenge from her husband, Bill, to write about both subjects. The result would be, he insisted, more than beneficial to interested readers, especially those with children and grandchildren themselves. The result is a guide filled with good and practical ideas from years of reflected wisdom and experience.

There are, of course, three basic things that all children need to know: they are good, beautiful and loved. Much of the rest of raising of children and grandchildren is simply commentary on those basic themes.

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The examples used in the book are based on actual happenings and this lends a more realistic viewpoint to the discussion of various topics. And the book itself is based on professional information gleaned from some excellent resources. It is a bright, uplifting and, most of all, an encouraging book for parents, teachers and children.

An important point in the book is that the author encourages parents to read to their children, even before birth! Reading aloud to children, and who cannot fondly remember such an experience, is good for all concerned. And listening to children, on the part of both parents and other adults, is also quite important. It gives the child a sense of his/her own identity and importance as an individual who is with adult consideration. Part of the time, unfortunately, parents and other adults only partially listen at best to children. Listening to children also encourages the development of their verbal and cognitive skills. It also gives children, due to the adults' attentive attitude, the understanding that what they say and who they are is truly important.

What is also important to a child's success in school is the ability on the part of parents to create a desire in children to learn to read because books and reading are both exciting and delightful.

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Children need to have such a reading desire generated in their home long before they enter formal schooling. This is an excellent help in guaranteeing a child's future success in education and later life. Reading to children while they are still young enough to want to imitate what they see and hear increases their interest and actually helps to build up their imagination.

The book also gives sound advice on how parents may interact with school principals and teachers to the benefit of the child concerned. There is no need for confrontation but much can be accomplished with cooperation in the area of formal education. Part of this advice is listed under the intriguing title: "How to Turn an Enemy into a Friend" and also, "Things to Do with and for your Child." Most important, of course, is spending time with and encouraging your child.

Then the question is asked: Why is homework needed? It should be considered by parents and children alike, the author says, as an extension of the learning process and not as a penalty imposed by teachers who dislike both students and parents, and simply wish to disturb evenings at home.

Setting aside a time and place for homework --- with parents nearby to aid, only when absolutely necessary --- is a great help in a child's learning process.

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The topic of punishment is well presented by the author who contends that to be effective it must impress on the child the wrongness of some behavior, and it must be an incentive not to repeat the action. This can be done ^(N) by depriving the child of something that the child enjoys rather than inflicting physical hurt. Unfortunately, physical punishment can actually make children "scared stiff" of the parents they should love and trust.

As an antidote to TV, the author suggests that parents or an older child should read aloud to the rest of the family. And the signs ^(BE) of a healthy family would be those which spend less than 20 hours a week watching TV; parents who supervise what and when their children watch TV; and parents who never let TV interrupt family time together at the table.

According to the author, the time from 3 p.m. to 8 a.m., when the children are with their parents, is the most important part of a child's day. In addition, children have a much greater need of good role models than of negative critics. Parents, too, need to be aware of the fears of children such as serious disturbances in their daily lives, of doing poorly in school, and of the dark. Loving and caring parents can help to alleviate such fears and bring about happier childhoods for their offspring. This book will help in many such ways. (Fr. Kevin Shanley)