

The Power of One . . . Making Children Feel Special *Yvonne Walsh*

Children are like parcels that we unwrap and learn about as we go. Their personality is affected by their experiences and perceptions, and it is lovely to watch this unfolding. We need to take care that every child is treated as an individual and special.

Here are some of the ways this can be achieved!

- **Always greet each child by name when you see them** – make eye contact, smile and preferably touch them lovingly. A warm welcome is very powerful. ALWAYS tell them you love them, that you think they are special, you missed them, they are lovely/handsome, - never miss an opportunity to compliment them and express your feelings about them. Don't be afraid of using terms of endearment. "Sweetie", "Darling," "Precious," – these touch their hearts.
- **Remember what they like and dislike.** Respect those likes and dislikes, but realize that their tastes are still developing and they can be encouraged to try new things, or old foods in a new way. Grandparents have a tremendous advantage – children often think that Grandma's food is THE best.
- **Spend time with each one in a one-to-one capacity.** Find activities that are special to you and him/her. An ongoing interest in nature, a book or author, a game or activity. One on one projects "honour" the child, give him the feeling of being "equal" – and are not patronizing or demeaning of his "smallness".
- **TOUCH is so valuable.** If there are too many talking and one is being "left out" or talked over, put a hand on his shoulder, or touch his arm so he knows you are still aware of him. Even big kids love to be hugged. (Yes, really) Snuggle the little ones and they will get used to your touch, and you will not seem distant to them as they grow up.
- **Be thoughtful.** Little touches make such a difference. Have special treats for the children – a sleepover in the holidays when



Yvonne Walsh and Jessica (7)

they can come on their own, perhaps. And treat them as a VIP guest.

- **Always be gentle, even if you have to be firm.** Always be kind – there are lots of tender feelings around. Be sensitive to their feelings – especially to boys who may not like to show tender feelings. It is OK for them to express their feelings – and you can teach them wise ways to do this.
- **I have a folder for each child,** which I put their school report copies in, their art work (whatever is not displayed around the house) their letters, or pictures in. They can look through this themselves and see that we have valued what they have given us.
- **Get down at their level and play with them.** Play hide and seek. Chase them round the lawn. (Think of all the fitness benefits you get as well!) It's OK to be silly at times. It maybe building blocks, or playing Monopoly. Teach them something while you are doing this – how to balance blocks so they don't fall over – how to strategize in Monopoly... there are many skills they can learn from you as they go. Don't set out to win at

all costs, but use the game as an opportunity to teach them how to play fairly and develop skills.

I often use the phrase "you are my favourite..." my favourite big girl, my favourite pianist, my favourite helper at clearing the table, etc. Whatever they are good at. Children love inclusiveness. Honest, sincere praise and recognition is a powerful confidence booster.

*Yvonne Walsh attended the first Cambridge LLL Group back in 1967. She soon became a Group Leader and also edited the **Leaderette**, a journal published for LLLNZ Group Leaders, the precursor to today's **Mosaic**.*

*Yvonne has four children and eleven grandchildren! She is 'a very hands-on grandmother and has a **very** good relationship with all her grandchildren'!*

*By a series of coincidences we found each other after 30+ years and I learned that Yvonne continues her writing. The above article was first published by **Parenting** magazine and is printed by permission.*