

BY LINDA MEI LIN KOH An English proverb says, “Charity begins at home.” So do values.

The Lord has instructed parents, first and foremost, to teach their children the commandments of God (see Deut. 6). This obligation cannot be delegated. Ellen G. White in her early writings indicated that “fathers and mothers are responsible for the health, the constitution, the development of the character of their children. No one else should be left to see to this work. In becoming the parents of children, it devolves upon you to cooperate with the Lord in educating them in sound principles.”¹

The home is the first and most effective place in which children are to learn values and the lessons of life. Unfortunately, many children today are greatly impacted by media values that compete with those of their parents.

Douglas A. Gentile, a developmental psychologist and assistant professor at Iowa State University, and one of the top researchers in the United States on the effects of media on children, says: “A clear and consistent pattern of empirical results has emerged from over four decades of research on the effects of media violence. It is surprising that many people still resist the idea that media violence has negative effects.”²

Gentile’s studies also highlight how media have eaten up our precious time for interacting with our children. On average, children spend about 30 minutes with their father during the week, but 20 hours with the television. Gentile’s latest study of nearly 2,500 youth found that video games are indeed effective teaching tools. Students who played multiple violent video games actually learned through those games to produce greater hostile actions and aggressive behaviors over a span of six months.³ It’s therefore imperative that parents who want their children to grow up with strong Christian values must be *intentional* in teaching these values to them. This can’t be left to chance.



Authors Pam Schiller and Tamera Bryant in *The Values Book* sound a similar warning: “The values we impart to our children today, consciously and unconsciously, will have a major impact on society tomorrow. If we continue to leave the teaching of values to chance, we, as a nation, risk losing an integral piece of our culture altogether.”⁴ This includes our Christian heritage!

Why Are Values Important?

Values guide our actions in life; unfortunately, however, many people in today’s postmodern society have abandoned “moral absolutes.” They say there is no definite right or wrong. George Barna in his book *Generation Next* noted that about 75 percent of all adults reject the idea of absolute moral truth. So three quarters of adults in the United States embrace some form of “amorality,” which is defined as lacking a moral sense and being unconcerned about the rightness or wrongness of something.

According to Donna . Habenicht, professor emeritus of educational and counseling psychology at Andrews University, a strong Christian value system will be of immeasurable worth to our children throughout their lives, because “it will light the dark moments of decision, point the way to the path of integrity, and keep their souls in tune with God. Values provide a sense of purpose for life. They direct the means and ends of actions. They are standards of conduct. They are qualities of the soul. They matter in every aspect of life.”⁵

Effective Methods of Teaching Values

How do we go about teaching our children values that will lay the foundation for strong character? How can we instill good biblical values in young children so they grow up as strong adults who will not compromise their faith? Here are some principles that can guide us:

1 Model basic values. There is no single better way to teach than by example. The old adage “Do what I say and not what I do” simply doesn’t work. In reality, values are more often caught than taught. If parents want to teach compassion, they have to model this in their daily life, such as by helping the homeless or serving in a shelter. The words of famous evangelist Dwight Moody underline the power of example: “Where one man reads the Bible, a hundred read you and me.”⁶

Ellen G. White expressed similar views when she said: “Parents are giving to their children an *example* either of obedience or of transgression. By their *example* and teaching, the eternal destiny of their households will in most cases be decided. In the future life the children will be what their parents have made them.”⁷

2 Watch for teachable moments. In daily life there are often occasions in which to initiate a values discussion if you develop an “eye” for teaching opportunities. While watching the evening news, if you see a story about someone who jumped into the river to save a person who was drowning, you can talk about courage and love: “What would you have done in that situation, Carlos?” Or if you notice your child being unkind to a friend on the playground, you can talk to your child about the value of kindness and helpfulness. Look for opportunities, or “teachable moments,” to ask your child about the experience and discuss the values you feel are pertinent.

3 Share great stories. Build a library of stories and picture books in your home that teach values. Encourage your children to read them. or the younger ones, parents can read to them or together with them. Some of the best loved stories are the personal experiences of parents when they were young. Tell your children life stories about being honest or being faithful in keeping God’s Sabbath. Discuss your personal faith journey. Talk to them about how you became a Seventh day Adventist. Share personal answers to prayer. These testimonies will thrill your children as well as help them learn about your values.

4 Practice positive discipline. It’s important to set boundaries for children and apply them consistently. When they have crossed the boundaries, parents need to discipline. Here are some guidelines:

a. *Correct misbehaviors with love.* Parents and teachers need to take effective actions when a child’s behavior departs from the correct principles. Children need direction and guidance in making things right, but love should always be the basis of correction.

b. *If punishment is given, explain the reason for it.* Children have to know what they have

done wrong and why they are being grounded or not allowed to watch their favorite TV program.

c. *Avoid being authoritarian.* Parents and teachers who control children strictly through punishment and reward retard moral growth. Adults who treat children with respect, fairness, and consideration promote moral growth.

d. *Celebrate right behaviors.* As parents, we are quick to correct and slow to praise our children. In teaching values, we should not only correct wrong behavior but reward behavior that exemplifies good values. When your children are honest, even when it's difficult to be so, affirm them and tell them how proud you are of their honesty.

5 Serve others together. Involving our kids in service projects, such as assisting at a soup kitchen for the homeless or mowing the lawn for elderly neighbors, will help them see you in action living the values you advocate. This also provides opportunities for them to interact with those in need.

Although transmitting values is primarily the responsibility of parents, the church as a faith community also plays an important role in supporting and reinforcing these values in the lives of children. Church leaders and children's leaders should seize opportunities to communicate and teach values to children and youth when they work alongside them in service projects, or when they're working as counselors in youth camps or other programs and activities. They could raise questions, identify moral issues, and help the children to think through to solutions.

If we want to develop strong Christian characters in our children, it requires that parents be *intentional* and *proactive* in teaching them our values as we lead them to their loving Savior, Jesus Christ.

1 Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 187.

2 Douglas A. Gentile, *Media Violence and Children* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 2003), p. .

3 Douglas A. Gentile and R. Gentile, "Violent Video Games as Exemplary Teachers: A Conceptual Analysis," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* (2008): 127-141.

4 Pam Schiller and Tamera Bryant, *The Values Book: Teaching 16 Basic Values to Young Children* (Beltsville, Md.: Gryphon House, 18), pp. 6, 7.

5 Donna Habenicht, *10 Christian Values Every Kid Should Know* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald, 2000), p. 17.

6 <http://thinkexist.com/quotation/quotes/DwightL.Moody/>.

7 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 11. (Italics supplied.)

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