

mind and he or she is *most* easily coached to talk about it — whatever it is. Open ended questions will often open a flood of discussion. For a young child a parent might ask; “*what was something you did today that you really enjoyed?*” Or if the parent perceives that the child seems down or unhappy he or she might say; “*Looks like you might have had a bad day, tell me what happened.*”

If parents can’t be there when the children get home from school, the cookies or popcorn can be left on the kitchen table with perhaps a note that reads; “*Hope you had a good day — want to hear all about it when I get home — Mom*” Or; “*Here’s a hug and some cookies. Help yourself. See ya’ when I get home — want to hear about your day. Make some notes so you don’t forget any of it. Love, Mom*” Then no matter how difficult it might be for parents to do, be *absolutely certain* that there is time to *do what the note said* we would do!! *Make* the time to talk about the day. Let the children *know* how very important they are to us.

If parents will only encourage it, the kitchen table can become a counselor’s office, a laboratory, a teacher’s desk or a variety of other things that can help our children deal with life and growing up. A kitchen table can be a place where “group therapy sessions” are held *every* day while eating an evening meal — a time when families share the good, the bad and the ugly of everyone’s day in the family. The kitchen table can be a game room where families share activities in which they all enjoy participating or it might be the place where the evening is spent with all the children gathered around it doing homework. We can be fairly sure that when the “kitchen table door” is *always* open, children are likely to frequently walk in. After all, how many children will turn down a plate of warm cookies and a glass of milk or a bowl of popcorn and a soda after a hard day of school or while they do that dreadful homework assignment? In fact, there aren’t many children who won’t be *anxious* to get home if they know there’s a welcoming committee (parents) waiting to focus attention solely on them for at least awhile. Children will *know* how important they are to parents when parents “go the extra mile” to be certain they feel wanted and appreciated rather than a burden.

Children who have no doubt that parents genuinely hurt when they hurt, cry when they cry and laugh when they laugh look *forward* to *sharing* hurts and joys with those parents. Parents who have an attitude of “*get over it, it’s part of growing up. I lived through it, so can you*” will generate no desire in their children to share feelings with them. *Work* at keeping children talking. Make every effort you possibility can to *be* there whenever they’re most likely to share feeling so they’ll know how *very* much you value them. When children *see* how very much you’re willing to sacrifice for *them*, they’ll know just how very much Jesus sacrificed for each of *us* and they’ll have *no doubt* about how very special they are to God.

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Dennis and Sherri Owens — Cincinnati, Ohio  
[diligence@gorfsystems.com](mailto:diligence@gorfsystems.com) — <http://www.gorfsystems.com/diligence/>

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# DILIGENCE

“We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure.” — Hebrews 6:11

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## The Kitchen Table

In the previous issue of *Diligence* we briefly mentioned the “kitchen table and the house that surrounds it.” It’s quite possible that the kitchen table *may* be one of the more important locations of the entire home. Generally, we could assume that every member of the family uses it at some time during each day — perhaps even two or more times a day. Those families that load up a plate and wander off to whatever room the television set is in are missing some of the absolutely greatest and best opportunities to communicate with their children or to communicate as a family. Parents might find it easier to “manufacture” opportunities for communicating with their children at the kitchen table than just about any other location in the home. We’re going to discuss some of those opportunities later in this issue, but since it’s pretty obvious that the kitchen table is not going to be the center of any meaningful discussions with a child who has just learned to crawl and pull him or herself up to anything within reach, let’s start with the rest of the house and get to the kitchen table later.

Walk into most any day care facility today and we see that there are signs above many of the objects and articles of furniture with the Spanish word/s for that particular object. Why? Because the children will learn several foreign words as they go through the days spent there. They may not even be aware that they’re learning foreign words for such things as computer, rest room, desk, book, water etc.. Nevertheless, when the signs are eventually removed, many of the children will remember the foreign words for some of those items. Day care and pre-school facilities do such things as this because they understand that the entire area is a classroom and that children will learn *more* than they are specifically taught.

We’re not suggesting that parents place signs throughout their house (although we have known some who did just that). What we’re talking about here is a concept that is involved with learning. We need to teach our children a *lot of things* during their very young years. Since we can’t continuously “hammer” in information, we need to teach various lessons throughout the course of daily interaction. Every day our homes are a continuous classroom or learning experience for those of us who are in it. Children are constantly learning *something* especially when they are very young — what and how they learn that “something” is up to us as parents.

Let’s consider an example. Both home #1 and home #2 have a child who is just learning to pull up to chairs and tables. Both of the children are very active and

constantly moving about (as most do at this inquisitive age). Both homes have a variety of items, including a candy dish, magazines, etc. on the coffee table in the family room. The parents in home #1 decide it's way too time demanding to constantly monitor this little one so they remove all of the tempting items within reach of the child and places them on an end table that is taller and out of reach of the little one. It's much easier and a lot less demanding on the parents.

Home #2 takes a different approach however. Nothing is removed from the coffee table and the parents very closely monitor the child's movements. The word "no" is *frequently* used and a parent *frequently* rushes to remove the magazine or candy dish from the grip of the youngster and accompanies their actions with an emphatic "no" as the item is placed back in it's original location and a toy belonging to the child is substituted and placed into the child's hand. This process seems to be *endlessly* repeated. The parents begin to wonder if their efforts are being wasted, but eventually the child learns that there are *appropriate* things to touch and to play with and there are *inappropriate* things.

Meanwhile, the child in home #1 has grown a bit and is now walking so the coffee table items are moved from the higher end table to the top of the television set. It's not long before the child learns that he can get a chair, climb up on it and *reach* the top of the television set. As the child continues to mature he unfortunately determines that as long as neither Mom or Dad *sees* him go after the forbidden items, they're there for the taking. The key is not getting *caught* in the process. This scenario goes on for the *rest* of that child's life — only the stakes become bigger and bigger. No *lesson* was learned about "forbidden items" — only that one just has to figure out how to get them without getting caught.

Now, the child in home #2 has also grown and there is *still* an abundance of candy and other tempting things on the coffee table readily available to him. Only it's not really that appealing anymore. He has learned through diligent supervision by the parents that candy consumption is occasionally acceptable with permission and in moderation. It's always there anyway — so what's the big deal? — it's just not as intriguing when it's not the "forbidden fruit." He has also learned that *certain* items, even though within easy grasp, simply aren't for his use. Home #2 taught at a *very early* age that just because he had *access* to certain things, it didn't mean that those things were always appropriate to have. There *were* certain things that were not to be touched and others that were acceptable for use in a responsible manner. These parents began teaching this child the art of critical thinking at a very young age. *This* scenario also goes on for the rest of *this* child's life — and when the stakes become bigger, the child is better equipped to make appropriate decisions.

This may be an over simplification of a very serious matter but it has numerous applications — most of which come down to the question of just how much *effort* are parents willing to put into raising their children "*in the nurture and*

*admonition of the Lord.*" We stated in the June 15<sup>th</sup> issue of *Diligence* that parenting "*takes planning, work, concern, dedication, energy, sacrifice, mental toughness, love, self discipline, involvement, training, a huge amount of time, and money as well as a variety of other commitments to raise to maturity the children that God entrusts to us for only those few short years.*" Our homes are the training ground for whatever those children will become when they have reached maturity. Every minute they spend there *must* be taken seriously by parents. Parents can't come home from work and act as if they're "off the clock." When they come home from work is when they go "*on the clock*" — the clock for being good stewards of the children God has given them to raise.

Home is so very important. It must be a haven where children know they are loved, wanted, protected, cared for, and even pampered at times. They must *always* feel comfortable and welcome in their own home. They have to know that their friends are always welcome and that their parents will be as hospitable to *their* friends as they are to their *own* friends. They need to *live* in their own home — not be afraid that a dirty footprint in the wrong room will result in working extra hours to earn enough money to have the carpet cleaned. While there are times that parents may need to relax the house rules, there are also times that call for strict discipline. Again, that's the fine line between spoiling and exasperating a child — the line that parents must learn to walk.

Let's get back to the kitchen table now. When children come home from a long, hard day at school (and yes, it *is* long and hard for them), they need a time to unwind, a chance to sort of rehash the days events. Interestingly enough, once they begin to verbalize some of those events, the ones they *thought* were absolutely terrible aren't nearly as bad as they thought they were. Just opening up and talking about them let's most of the steam off the kettle if there have been any problems.

Parents never know what kinds of situations their child may have encountered that day during school. If the child is still quite young, he may have had to deal with a bully threatening him at recess or the teacher may have disciplined him because of forgetting to do a homework assignment last night — an assignment that was forgotten because of leaving for Wednesday night church in a rush. Or if the child is somewhat older, she may have been approached with an opportunity to buy drugs that day or she may have been invited by a classmate to a Friday evening party where no parents would be present. Children face a myriad of dilemmas every day — dilemmas they could use some advice in knowing how to handle. That's where parents and the kitchen table come in.

It's not a big deal now for moms to have some fresh baked cookies (all we have to do is turn on the oven, unwrap the package and break apart the "pre-fab" product) and a cold glass of milk on the kitchen table when their child gets home from school. *That* can be the most important time a parent spends with his or her child. *That's* when the events of the day are fresh and weighing heavy on the child's