

Recently I observed a wonderful interchange in a restaurant between two women and a young girl of about 9-10 yrs old. One of the women resembled the young girl. I assumed she was her mother. I noticed that both women included the youngster in their conversation, talking with and listening to her during the meal. The three of them laughed frequently, and clearly enjoyed each other's company. At one point, the youngster told a rather lengthy story to which both women paid close attention.

What a great gift those two women give that young girl! In their company she was treated as a person of great value, regardless of her age. It was apparent to me that this is a child whose company is not just accepted or tolerated, but actually prized by the grownups in her life. Cherished. And her apparent confidence in the presence of adults made me think she knew it too.

Dorothy Briggs, in her fabulous book, Your Child's Self Esteem (on my "must read" list for every parent) dedicates an entire chapter to the concept of cherishing children. Briggs says that "Children survive on acceptance but they do not blossom in it. They need something stronger. They need *cherishing*." Then she goes on to define cherishing as "the feeling you have toward your child...sensing his uniqueness and finding it dear. In spite of intermittent irritations, you remain open to the wonder of him."

Cherishing is an important part of all meaningful relationships. The spouse or friend that sees our endearing qualities, overlooking the times we're NOT so dear, seeing the person beyond the faults, is cherishing us. Everyone needs a spouse or friend like that.

Because of their vulnerability children need cherishing even more than adults. Children learn how valuable they are as people from the way their parents react to them, talk about them and treat them. Cherishing is matter or respect. It is a matter of putting ourselves in the shoes of our children and treating them as we would like to be treated. This kind of respect is reflected in all the ways we interact with them: beginning as infants in how we pick them up, hold, bathe, dress, feed and diaper them. Then as they grow, it is reflected in how we talk, play, argue, and discipline them. In many little ways parents lose site of this and instead of focusing on the unique gifts of each child, they focus on what a child doesn't have. Briggs says that "when we habitually attend to what's missing, cherishing gets lost." When we give recognition for what they can do, we build their faith in themselves, respecting their rate of growth, giving them the courage to admit mistakes, take risks and feel good about the people they are.

This is cherishing at it's finest.

How do you know if you are doing a good job at cherishing your kids?

Briggs offers us a litmus test: "Ask yourself this question," she suggests. "If I were to treat my friends as I treat my children, how many friends would I have left?" Think about it. Your answer to that question, and what you do about fixing an answer you don't like, will change your parenting.