

# Families That Thrive

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## The Goal of Parenting

When I played little league, our coach was constantly admonishing us, “Keep your eye on the ball!” I know what he meant: “Watch the ball at all times!” Every once in a while, one of us boys would “take our eye off the ball,” which would result in our getting hit *by* the ball. One boy even ended up having the ball hit him on his eye—literally. He ended up with quite the shiner.

It wouldn’t be accurate to say that as parents Nancy and I *always* kept our eyes on the ball. We are human, and being human, we will make mistakes. But we tried to keep our eye on the ball enough of the time to be effective enough of the time.

The challenge with parenting is that it is often like juggling. We’re trying to keep several balls in the air at once. Even so, there’s one ball that’s essential. It has to do with what we’re finally up to as parents: *The goal of parenting is to turn our children into adults.* To put it another way, the goal of raising our children is to get them out of the house! By that, I simply mean that one of our main jobs as parents is to give our children the wherewithal to live in the real world as adults. Parenting is about enlarging our children’s capacities for taking responsibility to live effectively in the world.

Nancy and I found that we could work towards this goal by treating Jaime and David as adults. I don’t mean that we tried to get them to grow up too fast. Nor do I mean that we tried to burden them with responsibilities that were way out of proportion to their age levels and capacities. But I do mean that we taught them to think and to act as adults all along the way. We tried not to hold them back. We tried not to be overprotective. Stated positively, we tried to encourage them to do everything they were capable of.

Perhaps the most important thing Nancy and I did for Jaime and David was to welcome their presence when we were discussing sensitive issues. We tried to avoid saying, “Now, you children run along and play. We’re going to have a little grownup talk.” There were a couple of reasons for this strategy. We wanted them to learn how grownups try to function by being with us. What better way for children to learn how to be adults—to think and to act as adults—than from their parents? What we didn’t want to happen was for them to feel our rejection and then turn around and try to find out how to be adults from their friends. Most young people have ideas about what it means to be a grownup. The problem is that few young people know how to be adults, and fewer still know now to teach someone else.

Yes, there is some risk. None of us is perfect when it comes to resolving adult issues in mature ways. This means that our children will see us struggle and see us fail some of the time. But this is also a big part of being an adult. Failure happens. Not all failure is our own fault, but some of it is. One of the keys to effective living is to learn from our failures and to try to improve. I remember the father in the latest Batman movie. He overstated this idea a bit when he said to his son, Bruce, “We fall down so that we can learn to pick ourselves up.” The truth is that we will fail at least some of the time. Our children will also fail some of the time. Recovering from failure, learning from failure, and applying what we learn are at the heart of living effectively as a human being. If our

children are with us in our grownup failures and recovery, they become spiritually richer. They are all the more equipped for the difficulties of adulthood.

Preparation for adulthood lies at the heart of effective parenting. To do this, we can't wait until our children are eighteen years old to start treating them like adults. They need for us to start as early as possible. They may just rise to the occasion. Our families might just thrive!