

# Smart Love in Action

REMEMBER THE WORD **SMART** WHEN RESPONDING TO YOUR CHILD

## SMART LOVE<sup>®</sup> FAMILY SERVICES

### STAY POSITIVE

All parents feel stressed and overwhelmed at times. In difficult situations, when you are able to stay calm and positive, your child is more likely to be receptive to your help and easier to manage. When you remain positive about your child and the difficulty she is experiencing, it is easier to find constructive and creative solutions to help her regain her happiness and equilibrium (as well as yours!). Best of all, a positive approach causes your child to feel positively about herself and your relationship.

### MODEL KINDNESS

Research shows that children copy how we treat them, then treat themselves and others the same way. Guidance and kindness are not mutually exclusive. So, when you guide with kindness, over time children develop an internal compass based on compassion toward themselves and others. Their day to day choices are based on a desire for positive self-caretaking and positive relationships with others. An inner compass based on positive self-esteem is the most effective tool children have in being able to make good choices (personal, social, academic) throughout their lives.

### ACKNOWLEDGE FEELINGS

Make yourself available to hear your child's feelings and try to understand his experience - especially when he is unhappy and struggling. This is how he will come to feel unconditionally loved and lovable. There are times he may not be able to have what he wants, but even when he is struggling and out of sorts, he learns that he can always have your positive regard and understanding. By taking his feelings seriously, you help him understand himself, trust your relationship, and instead of acting out his feelings in negative ways, learn to turn to caring relationships for comfort and support.

### REGULATE BEHAVIOR

It is always important to step in to manage your child's unsafe, immature, or out of control behavior. You teach your child healthy self-regulation by intervening to change the behavior (despite your child's complaints or protests), while remaining firm, yet compassionate and understanding. Let your child know the reason for your guidance without "arguing" or expecting him to necessarily agree or understand why he can't have what he wants in the moment. Keep in mind that the most important thing your child wants is to feel lovable and loved by you, especially when he experiences disappointment or frustration.

### TIME-IN TOGETHER

It is always best to offer solutions to problems that bring you and your child closer ("time-in"), rather than isolating her or withdrawing your love and approval. Your love and approval builds her positive self-esteem, and teaches her that problems can be resolved within a caring relationship, instead of isolation or with negativity and force. Your relationship with your child can also be viewed as a partnership with a shared goal. All parents love their children and want the best for them. All children come into the world loving their parents, wanting to be happy and to feel loved and lovable in their parent's eyes. It is within the context of a close loving relationship with their parents that children become happy, and your child's deepest desire is to have that kind of relationship with you. A close and loving relationship is deeply pleasurable for both parent and child.

**Note about Immediate Health and Safety Concerns:** if your child is about to engage in something unsafe, such as riding a bike into the street or hitting a sibling: first, step in immediately to stop the behavior, then follow the rest of the steps.

**Remember:** Smart Love is not permissive. Children need their parents' loving guidance to learn healthy self-regulation. When you use Smart Love, you respond to your child's immature behavior **WITHOUT** harshness (anger, reprimands) or negative consequences (threats, rewards, time-outs). Punitive measures breed resentment, anger, and negative self-esteem in children. Smart Love brings joy to parenting and happiness to children.

The Smart Love Approach was developed by Martha Heineman Pieper, Ph.D., and William J. Pieper, M.D., and is described in their book *Smart Love*. The Natalie G. Heineman Smart Love Preschool offers classes for 3-5 yr. olds, Parent and Tot classes for children 12-36 mos., and Mom and Baby Group. Smart Love Family Services provides counseling for children and families based on the Piepers' therapeutic approach, Inner Humanism<sup>®</sup>. Parenting programs include private parent coaching, educational seminars (co-sponsored by the Intrapsychic Humanism Society) and publications. Copyright 2012 Smart Love Family Services, an Illinois-based 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization.