

THE FOUR LEGGED STOOL

by Sally Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

I spent a number of days over the last week looking after my fifteen-month-old grandson. My daughter was ill and her husband had to work. Of course I didn't mind and she was very grateful that I was available to drop everything and come to the rescue with no notice.

This situation took me back to when my children were toddlers and I thought about how I managed under similar circumstances. I could throw in the fact that for some of the time I had no vehicle and/or no family in the same town. For some of those toddler years my husband was averaging 70 hours of work a week. We made it, but I have to confess it is all a pretty dim memory now.

Mothers have fabulous 'forgetteries'. We remember all the good bits and, thankfully, the rest falls into the amnesia basket. Even after having a second child all is well until that first contraction, and then you say, "What was I thinking?"

Parental support through our child-rearing days is vitally important. There is no manual and we do our best, but there is nothing like reassurance from those we trust and love and someone who has been through what we are now experiencing.

Think of our support systems being like a four-legged stool. If just one of those legs is missing, the stool can become unstable when a lot of weight is placed on it. If two legs are missing it won't even stand up. So what are those legs of stability we need to help us through our life experiences?

- a) The first leg to have is a strong faith. God promises us strength and comfort in times of trouble. His Word also gives us wonderful parenting guidelines.
- b) The third leg of the stool is support from within the home. This would be our spouse – that partner who is the provider and second child minder, the person who will encourage us, love us and share the parenting responsibility of guiding our children to become mature, caring, giving adults. I understand that in many homes today single parents have to be Mom and Dad to their children. In this case I would suggest a close family friend or relative be chosen who is willing to be a caring role model and positive influence for them.
- c) The second leg is the support of family and friends outside of the home. These need to be people we can trust and who care about us. People who will love us for who we are, who will give us good advice when we ask for it and, on occasions, look after our kids when we have an appointment or simply need a break.

- d) The fourth leg of the stool is you. To be a great role model and caregiver you need to be physically, emotionally, socially and spiritually healthy. This can be very difficult when you feel so tired from the daily workout of parenthood. You need to look after yourself for your own sake as well as for the family. Take time to assess yourself on a regular basis. Are you eating enough, resting enough, having time to yourself? It is important that your children have routines in their lives, but you, as caregiver, need to have a routine too - one that enriches your own life. Schedule in time to meditate on God and visit with friends and family. Schedule in date nights with your spouse. You need all the encouragement and love you can get.

Parenting is a wonderful experience when you have a four-legged stool. It allows you to enjoy the good times, but also to be equipped and ready for rough patches.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.