

BE OPENLY AFFECTIONATE

by Brian Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

I couldn't help notice in our Mothers' Day church service today a 14 year-old boy being affectionate to his mom as the pastor spoke in superlatives about mothers. After the service I went up to the boy and told him to never give up on showing affection to his parents. He and his dad both smiled in acknowledgement. "Even if your mother brings something to you at school, be prepared to hug her in front of your friends," I said to yet more smiles.

If only there were more families where obviously open and deliberate affection was demonstrated! Why is it that some people find giving affection so difficult? Maybe the parents, or one of them, grew up in an affection-sterile home. We had a friend like that. Hugging her was reminiscent of the greenie tree huggers. Honestly, she was as straight and rigid as a board. Hugging obviously scared her and was not in her repertoire.

Some dads who raised a 'daddy's girl', sometimes back off showing affection to their daughters once they reach puberty for fear of being accused of molestation. This fear is real, but unnecessary. Sure, some of the things you used to do like tickling and smooching would have to be curtailed, but hugging, holding, quick kissing and affectionate words should never cease.

Boys need affection just as much as girls. Some of the things you can continue with boys are patting on the back, ruffling their hair, embracing, 'atta-boys', high fives and words of affection. Boys usually accept being kissed by their dads until around puberty. You just need to read how they receive that and be prepared to back off if the signal indicates that they are uncomfortable. It seems that moms can keep on kissing and do all the affectionate things right through their children's lives.

Affection is so essential to the development of a human being. Everyone needs it and inwardly desires to be held, patted, kissed, or spoken to in an affectionate way, but some families have done a good job of killing it!

During the 'Cold War' in Eastern Europe many parents couldn't afford to keep some of their children. These children were often sent to orphanages where the staff was usually told to look after the children's basic needs only. They were not to offer affection as that might create bonds that were too hard to break. The results were shocking. When Communism in Eastern Europe fell and news got out about the orphanages journalists photographed and wrote about the affection-starved children. They rocked back and forth, could hardly speak and their eyes looked hollow.

In many homes in America there are affection-starved children who are deprived of so many things that make up a healthy personality. Research shows that such children look elsewhere for affection if they don't get it at home. Many equate sex with affection that may lead to promiscuity. For many boys it can lead to joining gangs where a different form of affection and loyalty is exhibited.

Affection is absolutely free. Affection is God-given (God so loved the world) and needs to be part of our behavior if we value wholeness. If we have come from an unaffectionate background it is still possible to practice being affectionate. You need it and your children desire it and deserve it! Showing affection can transform your whole home environment and tells your children in a tangible way they are loved.

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.