

# VIP Value In Parenting

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## Welcome to Value In Parenting

Welcome to the first issue of *VIP*, a newsletter for parents of young children in Orange County. The Orange County Parenting Coalition is happy to be a part of Orange County Partners for Children Project, a group bringing together parents, schools, agencies and local government. We want to give Orange County parents the tools they need –

because kids don't come with instructions, and sometimes being a parent isn't easy!

Our purpose is simple – to help you do the most important job in the world – *parenting!* We can tell you where to find help, education and support while you raise your children.

As I sit and think about the tragic experience in Littleton, Co., and the other episodes of school violence which have occurred over the past years, I know that others share in my shock, grief and confusion. For this reason, we have pre-empted our first issue topic, *PLAY: the Work of Children*, to address the critical parental issue of preventing violence.

The escalation of violence in our society worries many thoughtful people. While reported homicides are actually on the decline, we, as a society, are impacted by an increasingly violent culture. In fact, violence has become a casual part of our everyday lives. This gratuitous violence has its costs. Many of our children are fearful, when they should be carefree. Many parents worry about sending their children off to school or out to play.

Fortunately, there are ways that individuals, families and communities can contribute to building a safer environment for our children, and a more caring neighborhood in which to live, work and play. Recently, Dr. James Garbarino, Professor of Human Development at Cornell University, shared his ideas on how communities can help to raise healthy children in a "socially toxic environment." While parents, schools, community members, and local government must be partners in the process, the greatest influence on most children still remains the home environment. Here are some ways parents can assist in preventing youth violence and keep children safe.

❖ **Let children know that you will help protect them:**

Keeping children safe is one of the many responsibilities of being a parent. In fact, it is a primary responsibility of all adults! It is our job to help children, both our own and others who may not have someone to watch out after them, stay physically and morally safe. Children also need

## Keeping Children Safe

(...and preventing violent behavior)

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messages reaching children about the different ways one should act. Media brings thousands of behavioral and value messages to your children every day. Let children know *what you believe in* through your words and your actions. Listen to their beliefs and opinions with openness and respect. Let them know if you don't agree with them and why.

❖ **Help your children become involved in their home, school and community:**

When children feel that they are a part of something larger than they are, they are loyal and seek to protect it. Help your children develop relationships with other children, adults and community members. Volunteering together for a cause that you both believe in, or encouraging them to join in a school organi-

zation or team can help your child learn acceptance, tolerance, and responsibility - three key social skills. As we work to expand our connections within our schools and neighborhoods, the result will be more caring and safer communities.

❖ **Encourage creative conflict-solving:**

Children are not born knowing how to resolve conflicts, but learn from viewing and imitating the adults with whom they live and interact on a regular basis. Help children to learn and practice the skills needed to solve conflicts in a non-violent manner. This requires clear communication, respect for all persons involved, and an interest in solving the problem in a way that helps everyone to feel "OK." While one's first instinct may be to respond violently to a conflict, this pattern can be replaced with a more positive problem solving approach.

❖ **Be available to children:**

There is nothing that a child needs more than presence. (When reading this sentence to a child, they all agree!) Children of all ages need quantity, as well as quality time. In fact, some child development special-

to be assured that it is acceptable to "break the code of silence" and let adults know when they have concerns about other children's actions.

❖ **Act in the way you want children to act:**

Because children learn the most by watching others and imitating their behaviors, parents can have the greatest influence on children by modeling positive behaviors in their home and community. According to Jennifer Birckmayer, Department of Human Development & Family Studies at Cornell University, "Children learn to be civilized by watching adults act in civilized ways. But it is not enough (although it is a step in the right direction) for us to demonstrate behaviors that are merely socially acceptable. We must also demonstrate how to be caring, compassionate and kind to our children, to our friends' children, and to children at risk of becoming violent or of becoming victims - in other words, to all children."

❖ **Make your beliefs and value systems clear to children:**

Today there are many conflicting

(Continued on other side)

# Keeping Children Safe *Continued from other side*

ists would suggest that adolescents need adults at home even more than toddlers! Let your children, and all the children with whom you interact, know that you are interested in them. Whenever you can, give each child some of your undivided attention.

## ❖ Set clear and consistent limits:

Limits help children feel safe and protected, as well as provide them with a "blueprint" of how to behave. Limits also let children know that you take your role as a parent seriously (we all know that it takes much more time and energy to be consistent and follow through with consequences than it does to give in to a child's demands). Through limits children learn to test rules, make mistakes, gain rewards and experience consequences. These are basic life skills that all children must learn. Clear and consistent limits can help children experience life in a way that allows for freedom and exploration in a safe environment.

## ❖ Limit children's exposure to media violence:

Studies have clearly proven that children who watch & engage in violent media play-act more aggressive toward peers and within the home. It is especially difficult for the youngest viewers, those under five, to separate fantasy from reality. Watch television with your children and allow those shows that illustrate non-violent approaches to resolving problems; restrict shows that have violent topics

as the main theme, or use violence as a form of entertainment. Many experts suggest that repeated exposure to media violence is making children "de-sensitized" to the value of life. Be equally aware of video games, where the child is often the one committing the violent act.

## ❖ Know your children's friends (and their families):

Know your children well enough to know their friends. Have them around. Make your home a safe place to be. Children need a safety net; they need to know that other adults care for them. If you have a serious concern about a friend, try to get to know the child. Making it OK for all friends to come to your house may lessen the tension when setting limits on a friendship. Be willing to talk to other parents if their children do something you consider unsafe or objectionable. It also helps to meet the families that will be interacting with your children.

## ❖ Be involved in your children's school:

It helps children to feel secure if their parents and teachers are working as a team. Communicate regularly with the teacher, sharing anything that may be effecting your child's classroom performance or behavior; have the teacher share his observations with you. Schools comprised of small, caring units (houses, clusters) help to create a sense of belonging among children. Show interest in your child's

work, and become involved in their school (there are many ways for you to volunteer!)

## ❖ Know where your children are:

When you're not with your children (whether they're in school, at a friend's house, or just "hanging out"), keep frequent tabs on them. While a beeper may be tempting, there's nothing that can replace the personal responsibility of a child "checking in" to let their parents know what they are planning and whom they are planning it with. Always let your children use you as an excuse for their inability to participate - ie., "I'd like to go to that party, but my mother won't let me stay out late on weeknights."

## ❖ Connect with support systems:

Just as your child needs your support and the support of his peers, parents need to know that they are not alone! By talking to your neighbor and meeting the parents of your children's best friends, you are gaining both knowledge about children ("thank goodness it's not only my child that...") and a grapevine of support. Through connecting with community agencies, in parenting classes and at PTA meetings, you can get the assistance you'll need to do the hardest job there is - parenting.

*For more information on this topic, call:  
Cornell Cooperative Extension: 344-1234  
Orange County Youth Bureau: 291-2399  
Orange-Ulster BOCES SETRC: 291-0520  
Dispute Resolution Center: 294-0892  
or your local school district*

## How Well Do You Know Your Son Or Daughter?

Do you ever wonder what happened to that "special little guy or gal"? Children have a way of changing on us, and we, the parents, need to revisit just how well we know these special people we live with.

**DIRECTIONS:** take a sheet of paper and fold lengthwise. Number 1 - 16 down the left side, leave two columns - one for your answer and one for your child's.

Remember: Sometimes people can live in the same family without really knowing each other very well. That means it's time to start tuning in to what's important in each other's lives.

If you've discovered that you do know each other pretty well, chances are it's because you pay attention to each other. So keep up the good work!

1. Name your child's best friend. (Parent says: "Name your best friend.")
2. What does your child like to do in his/her spare time?
3. Name one of your child's favorite music groups or recording artists.
4. What does your child like to do on Friday nights?
5. Name a famous person your child would probably love to meet.
6. Of what accomplishment is your child most proud?
7. Who is your child's least favorite teacher?
8. Name something that really upsets your child.
9. What would your child like to be when he/she grows up?
10. If you could buy your child any gift he/she really wants, what would it be?
11. What chores does your child dislike the most (Be specific)?
12. Where would your child like to go for a vacation?
13. What has been your child's biggest disappointment this year?
14. What causes your child the most stress?
15. What is something your child really likes about you?
16. What is something your child would like to do more often with you?

**SCORING:** Surprise! This quiz doesn't have a score tally. That's because the only score that matters is the one you give to yourself. So it's up to you to decide what this little quiz means.

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For more information on parenting education and/or the Orange County Parenting Coalition, contact Cornell Cooperative Extension at 914 - 344 - 1234.



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