

## Love - A Touching Experience

by Marilyn Spaw Krock

Close your eyes and create an image in your mind of two people very much in love. Are they touching each other? Undoubtedly they are because when people are in love there is a God-given, natural, human tendency to want to be close - to be touching. As parents of teenagers, we worry about this drive toward intimacy. Will they be able to control their biologic urges? Have we taught them the beauty of God's gift of human sexuality? Do we provide a lovingly affectionate family environment? Adults and teenagers are not the only people who crave physical touch. Studies indicate that abandoned babies raised in institutions where physical needs are met, but loving human contact is missing, fail to thrive and often die. Babies are easy to cuddle and stroke. As temperamental toddlerhood begins, finding an opportunity to cuddle becomes more challenging. Be sure to take the opportunities as they arise. Wakening, bedtime, and naptime can provide available openings. As children get older, schedules become more hectic, but make time for touching.

Bedtime back rubs were my ticket to quality time together. Five minutes of your undivided attention is important to children. Time together tells them they are loved and important to you. A digital clock by the bed measures the time; it is not arbitrary; bonus minutes given for good behavior; no interruptions for phone calls or other family members' needs. As children get older, they catch on to the fact that if they keep you talking you may stay longer. Sometimes these discussions are important and revealing. What a wonderful opportunity to plan tomorrow or evaluate today. You can even work in some spontaneous praying - "Thank you God for \_\_\_\_\_."

Fathers need to get involved in physical affection also. Over the last twenty years, men's roles have changed dramatically. Child care is no longer thought of as the woman's responsibility. Dads have learned to pitch in to diaper, feed, and bathe the kids, sometimes even better than moms. (Why is it that children seem to cooperate better with dads?) Although I generally hate billboards, one depicting a father tenderly holding and caressing his infant is a favorite of mine. Tenderness and caring are part of our human nature. God made us that way. For too long society looked on such characteristics as feminine. Look what has become of our society! God's plan for the creation of a human life is for a male and female to create that new life and nurture it together. Both parents have integral roles to play in the healthy development of the child they co-create with God.

Fathers sometimes become uncomfortable hugging their adolescent daughters, but girls need that physical affection at this stage of their life, more than ever. Lacking fulfillment of this need can lead to sexual promiscuity in a search for physical affection.

My husband has always been openly warm and physically affectionate with our children. When relatives spent time with us one year, the wife wrote in a thank you that watching him with the children inspired her husband to make the effort to start hugging his children more. He grew up thinking that hugging was "sissy." His dad never hugged him. She told me later that it made a world of difference in their family dynamics. Remember, you are modeling God's love in your daily actions!

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