

The following comments are from some of the mums who were on the course:

### **Swimming against the tide**

It is not always easy as a mum in this day and age to 'swim against the tide.' One of the issues my husband and I had to decide was at what age we allowed our children to 'do' certain things. With our eldest daughter it was the issue of what age we allowed her to go on the bus into the city shopping with her friends. We decided on what we thought was an appropriate age for her, but sticking to it proved quite challenging, especially when most of her friends were already going into the city shopping at a much earlier age and couldn't understand why our daughter wasn't allowed to go with them.

Just recently I was met with another one of these issues, this time with my youngest two children. They were both invited to the cinema. It was a film appropriate for their age but it was an evening showing and meant that by the time they got home it would have been gone 10 O'clock. My children have always had reasonably early bed-times and I decided that this was really a bit too late for them. The re-action I received from the parent was one of surprise and even disbelief that I wouldn't allow my children to go and see this quite popular film. (I would, but not at that time of night!).

Issues like these arise again and again and it proves quite a challenge at times to 'swim against the tide.' I have to remind myself constantly that Jesus swam against the tide too.

### **Time for 'just being'**

In this fast-paced, technological world we live in today, where every-body is very 'busy' I really cherish times for 'just being still.' A rather wet Sunday found us round the kitchen table. My youngest daughter wanted to colour in a poster she had been given and my son asked if he could do some sewing. I found an 'easy tapestry' picture and a good couple of hours was spent on these activities. Speaking to other mums I realised how we have become a society that needs to be entertained. Mums rush from this activity to that activity and feel they have failed their children if they don't. My youngest daughter doesn't go to any after school activity, at her own choice. I have asked her, (more because I feel I am failing her) 'wouldn't you like to go to Brownies, swimming club, dancing, etc. etc.' and am always met with the answer, 'no not now mummy.' I have decided to leave it at that, content at last that if she should chose an activity of some sort it will be because she is really interested in it, not because I feel it's what she should be doing, and feel a failure as a mum because I'm not rushing her here to this activity or there to that club. Maybe 'time for just being' isn't such a bad thing after all.

### **Shaping lives**

I attended the latest session in the 'Bringing up children' course run by the church this week and was reminded again what an awesome responsibility, but huge privilege, we have as parents to shape the lives of the little ones entrusted to us. It was always a disappointment to me that our first child did not come with a book of instructions!

As I have gone on to bring up our three children I have followed my heart and my instincts and tried to make the best choices for my children, but I have also sought good advice from experienced parents whose wisdom I respect and whose encouragement I treasure. There is nothing like those words 'I understand' from an older Mum when you've had a bad day or are feeling uncertain about the way forward. Her voice of experience is invaluable.

For a toddler, each day is an opportunity to learn and grow. As parents we have the opportunity to teach our children so much. They soak up everything like sponges, learning all the time about the world and people around them. But they are not the only ones learning. As parents we are discovering how to foster the delicate balance between encouraging independence and maintaining respect and discipline. We are finding ways to teach our children values and standards that will equip them for life, whether it be through a simple instruction to clear away their toys, through the structure of their daily routine, through our protection of them as we decide and monitor what they watch on television, or the value we place on them as we intervene on their behalf in a situation with another child. In a world where our children seem to grow up so quickly we have the power to impart so much that is positive. Our love and emotional involvement are vital to our children's well-being.

Home is where our children learn to trust, to love and be loved. Home is where a child learns who they are. Each of us is created uniquely by God - we have different gifts, talents and temperaments, and home is the place where those are discovered and celebrated. It is our job as parents to find ways to build emotional security for our children and provide the foundation for all that is to follow, so that they grow into the people God intended them to be.

### **Wet cement**

I attend Halesworth Community Church and have done over the past year. I have a two year-old daughter and my husband and I are trying to understand more and so the 'Bringing up children' course is something that will really be our support in doing so.

After attending the first meeting I came away with a picture in my mind which really summed up bringing up children for me. It was simply the imprint of two hands in wet cement – and then, more wet cement but no imprints. We had been hearing in church the previous Sunday that the first few years of a child's life is when their little emotional lives are being shaped – when the concrete is still wet! The imprint of the hands speaks of the involvement of parents in the process of shaping their children's emotional lives positively. The absence of the prints in the other cement reminds us that it is all too easy to not really be involved.

It made me think about what I would rather see/have with my daughter - the opportunity to really have a positive impact in her early years in every way by learning more, not just about her, but myself - or to miss her completely and regret it in later life when, for instance, I might not be able to connect to her emotionally? I want to be those hand prints.

Times can be hard with young children but I would urge any parent to encourage themselves with battles already won and be steadfast in knowing the qualities and strength it will have given the child/children.

### **On a journey**

I am attending the Bringing up Children course and have found sharing experiences with the other parents and the wonderful advice from our pastor and his wife invaluable. Tonight my little girl who is 2 and half went to bed after having a lovely day and a lovely bedtime and told me she didn't want to go to sleep. I thought that she just didn't want her day to end and was simply delaying the inevitable. What I didn't do was ask her the simple question 'why?' She may have been playing her parts or there may have been some other reason. It wasn't until I shared the incident with my pastor that I realised I had assumed instead of asking. I was told once, 'take your child by the hand and take them with you on their journey.'

## **The Best Reward**

I loved the comment made by the reader about her disappointment that her first child, 'did not come out with a set of instructions!' I have often thought that an instruction manual would be a wonderful thing to possess when I have found myself in another 'motherhood dilemma.' I have always loved this comment by John Wilmot, "When I got married I had six theories about bringing up children; now I have six children and no theories."

Being a parent is the most challenging, and at times, the hardest and most tiring 'job' that we will ever have. It is also the most valuable and most rewarding. Why then does 'parenthood' and in particular, 'motherhood' appear to be so under-valued in our society today? Should we not be nurturing and cherishing these roles, giving 'value' to them and give them their rightful place in society. There seems to be a notion today that a woman has to be someone other than just a 'mum' to feel appreciated and valued. If only we as a nation could recognise the importance of this role in our society.

"If we have been called by God to be mothers, let's drop all the activities that are making it so painful for us to enjoy our children. For everyone who says, 'But society needs me.' I would say, 'Let's give our children the time they need to help them grow into secure people'. We are adding a greater burden to society than we could ever compensate for with all our good deeds if we don't." (Pat King)

Being a mum takes up a lot of time and energy, self-sacrifice and selflessness, sometimes there isn't a lot of 'thanks', but as I have learned along the way, it is well worth the effort.

I looked at my sixteen year old daughter, now undertaking her GCSE's, the other day and found myself asking, 'how did we get to be here? Where did all those years go? It has been a real journey. At times it has felt like we were climbing a rocky mountain path and stumbling over the loose debris and stones. I've wanted to reach for that instruction manual more than once! But it has been a journey well worth the effort. After a day of revision and working indoors we enjoyed some time together while walking the dog. We stepped out into a bright spring afternoon and as we chatted and laughed and worried along the way I couldn't help feeling that the effort of steadily climbing that mountain path all these years was more than worth it. The view is beautiful.

## **The Wrong Glasses**

What do you do when a day starts so well and then ends up with tears, frustration and bad feeling? I suppose we can dismiss it as family life or just one of those things but it is possible to end up with a real sense of loss, disappointment and sadness. Of course there is a reason for everything ending so horribly wrong isn't there? A process of lengthy analysis follows as you try to find out the cause of the disaster, and as it is easier to point a finger at yourself rather than anyone else - after all you are 'mum' so who else could there be to blame - you convince yourself that you ruined the day.

I expect most of us have worn 3D spectacles for a film viewing. You quickly become part of the film as the characters seem to reach out and involve you in their antics! When we think the whole day has gone horribly wrong – maybe we are wearing the wrong spectacles! Everything has been 'in our face' and left us feeling overwhelmed. The effect seems to live on for some while afterwards too. Change the 3D spectacles to ordinary ones and, although you can empathise with the characters and story line, you are not totally consumed by it.

It is so much easier then to recognise that, perhaps only thirty minutes of the entire day went wrong and the rest of the day was really good. Failure, frustration, blame and guilt don't seem quite so relevant!

## **Responsibility**

This week in the 'bringing up children' course we have been learning about giving children the responsibility for chores around the home. It is so easy to do everything ourselves as parents, far quicker and avoids the grumbles and quarrels, less time consuming and doesn't involve any messiness. It is very easy to fall into the trap of doing things for our children without even realising it. My son was eight years old before it dawned on me that I was still helping him to get dressed in the mornings. Monday to Friday mornings that is, as at the weekend he was up and dressed before the rest of the family!

Giving children responsibility of having certain jobs and chores teaches a child to care about their home and share in looking after it with others in the family. It teaches respect for theirs and other people's belongings and ultimately respect for themselves and others. It can also teach them how to use their own initiative!

My son planted a vegetable garden this year with his granddads help. Granddad has been keeping a very close eye on things but is away on holiday this week. He left my son with strict instructions to water the strawberries and the beans which had just been planted, especially as we are having a very dry spell at the moment. My son has diligently watered the garden every evening. However he was beginning to get a little tired with having to haul heavy watering cans from the water butt to the garden, especially since the level has gone down so much he is having difficulty in reaching the water. This evening I found a hose-pipe connected to the tap in our outhouse and a very triumphant little boy asked me if I would like him to water my flower pots and tubs too! I only hope we don't have a hose-pipe ban.

Responsibility is a discipline well worth learning.

"The child who has everything done for him, everything given to him and nothing required of him is a deprived child..... The parent who tries to please the child by giving in to him and expecting nothing from him ends up in pleasing no one, least of all the child. For in the end, when trouble results, the child will blame the parent for his gutlessness." (Larry Christenson)

## **Older children**

I am a mum of older children, so as I sat in the latest meeting of the church's Bringing Up Children course listening to advice about setting healthy boundaries for little ones, my mind went back to my own children's younger years and it seemed like only yesterday. My teenage son, now taller than me, will follow his older sister and leave for university in the autumn, and it seems like only yesterday that he was riding his little car round and round the kitchen table. When my three children were toddlers the years of parenting seemed to stretch far ahead of me. There was enough to think about at each stage of their development to fill my hours, my thoughts and my prayers without looking too far into the future. I don't know why, but somehow the growing up process seems to have accelerated in their teenage years and the time really does seem to have passed by so quickly. I am very aware, however, that my job of being their Mum is far from over. The same need for understanding, guidance, encouragement and parental approval is still there as, one by one, I watch my children pass through the gateway into adulthood. I am also aware that my husband and I still need advice, support and encouragement too. The shift from being the primary influence in our

children's lives to releasing them to adulthood isn't always easy as we try to decide how to handle the different decisions and challenges that arise. I am thankful that we are in a church where we can share our concerns for our children as they learn to understand themselves, go through relationship struggles, sit important exams, decide on a career, develop political views, deal with the social pressure to 'fit in', or learn how to balance priorities or deal with conflict at work or school. I am sure this process is helped by preparing them for independence right from the start. The time for parental involvement should be at the very beginning. My advice to younger parents would be don't waste the opportunities to develop a strong relationship with your children, seek to really understand who they are, establishing love and respect, strengthened by open, honest communication – and take all the help, advice, support and encouragement that is on offer!