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Resolve to be a better caregiver, for a better world

The holiday season ends in reflection, as we hastily make New Year's Resolutions, vowing to change the course of our lives in the coming year.

The five most common resolutions relate to reducing debt and saving money, losing weight and developing healthier eating habits, exercising more, becoming more organized, and learning a new skill. By spring, most have been discarded.

What are your resolutions this year? How did you do with last year's? If your answers are like mine, it may be time to review our priorities. Do your goals relate to self-satisfaction, or does our happiness revolve around improving the quality of life for our families and community? Are you more likely to achieve your objectives independently or with the support of others?

Since the strength and support of family, friends, faith, and community is fundamental to personal well-being, we might consider the following family resolutions this year:

The Gift of Time

As parents and caregivers, we have the opportunity and responsibility to educate our children about ethics, decency, honesty, and cultural and family values. We transfer our ideals and principle to them by modeling appropriate behavior and repeatedly exposing them to what we respect and represent. The simplest way to achieve this goal is to consistently schedule together time. Some ways are to:

- Sit and eat meals together at least three times a week, without the distraction of television. Mealtime is a perfect time to discuss school, work, or events in the news. It is a time to share successes and failures, and everyone should be encouraged to contribute to the discussion and to ask questions.

- Stay involved with our children's education and development. We should make the time to read to young children at least 20 minutes every day. As children take on challenges in school, we must maintain active involvement with their academic activity by recognizing their strengths and weaknesses, monitoring their homework, and providing help and support.
- Make time for communication. Limit television time. Play board or interactive games as a family at least once a week. Sharing with our children allows us to communicate and teach in invisible ways.

Role modeling

As parents we are, to a large degree, responsible for whom our children become. Although each child is a unique individual, born with certain characteristics that influence their personality, their environment and relationships profoundly affect their growth and development. As parents and caregivers, we might resolve to:

- Demonstrate respect, patience, charity, and tolerance for others.
- Actively listen to them, make eye contact and display interest. Their problems and conflicts, though seemingly small and manageable to us, can be overwhelming to them. Be their champion.
- Avoid unhealthy habits. For our own health, as well as for theirs, we should eat a healthy diet, exercise, avoid excessive alcohol intake, and the use of any tobacco products. They are watching.

Structure the environment

Although though it may sound desirable to us, it is very difficult to be both a parent and a friend to our children. Since they tend to want to choose their own friends, we need to be their caregiver, provider, advocate, role model, coach, and teacher.

We must also set limits. For healthy development, children need to grow up in an environment where rules are set and expectations are clear. Without structure, children become confused, falsely empowered, and increasingly unmanageable. We must aim to:

- Know our children's strengths, weaknesses, and behavioral characteristics, and use that information to set age appropriate limits.

- Say “no”, when appropriate, and mean it. A parent who repeatedly gives in to crying, whining, and normal childhood selfishness and demands pays a penalty, as children learn to cope and relate in that manner.

Since there is nothing more valuable than the well-being of the children entrusted to our care. With this year’s resolutions, let’s make it clear to our children they are the priority in our lives and commit to giving them the gifts of time, values, and structure. If so, we, they, and society will be all the better for it.

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