

# Simple tips for raising children to be affectionate

Psychologists and physicians agree that human beings need affection and loving touch in their lives. We've all heard of research documenting that some infants who didn't receive affection and touch failed to thrive or even died. Our culture, however, places so much value on independence and a certain rugged individualism that it serves to diminish the value of affection overall.

Psychologist and author Harriet Heath, Ph.D., points out that instead of carrying babies close to our bodies, we often put them in hard plastic carriers. Speaking harshly to and spanking children is not uncommon in our culture.



## Parenting Tip

cooing, and snuggling.

**Toddlers:** As toddlers become more independent and mobile, they use that mobility to explore and then come back to you for hugs and kisses. Offer and accept affection freely. As they begin to talk, teach them to use kind words and a pleasant tone of voice.

**Preschoolers:** Point out to your preschooler how others are feeling. Establish routines of affection, such as goodbye hugs and goodnight kisses. Continue teaching him how different tones of voice sound and how to control his own.

**School-age:** Consider making goodbye hugs and kisses private at this age, instead of in front of other children at the bus stop—but don't stop giving them. Look for other times to offer and receive affection—while reading, watching TV or just snuggling on the couch. Let her know that hugs and kisses are important to you. A shoulder rub, stroking a child's hair, or even just holding hands are also ways to show affection. Continue to help her hear herself so that she learns how a demanding tone makes others feel put down.

**Teens:** Continue the above. Teenagers very much need to receive and give those hugs. They must be appropriate and kindly. Kind communication can be difficult at this developmental stage, but try to keep the idea subtly present.

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Boys in our society often withdraw from expressing affection at all. Doesn't sound very warm and cozy here, does it?

Don't get too depressed. Being affectionate is a value that can be consciously instilled and fostered in a family. Heath comments that all children have the capacity to be warm and affectionate; once their physical and safety needs are met, their social needs for being loved and giving love will motivate them toward being affectionate. Parents need to be aware of opportunities for showing and teaching affection throughout their development. In her book, "Using Your Values to Raise Your Child to Be an Adult You Admire," Heath offers these tips on instilling affection in children:

**Babies:** Hold, touch, cuddle and pay attention to your baby. Within the first two months of life, you should see your baby looking for affection and responding to smiles,