

**Message from
Vibert Kesler,
Executive Director:**

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine issued a 525-page report titled *Parenting Matters: Supporting Parents of Children Ages 0-8* which emphasizes the importance of a parent's influence, especially during the first eight years of a child's life.

Numerous groups, ranging from governmental institutions to educational, church, and other organizations, have recognized that age eight is a "hinge time" in the life of a child for many reasons, beginning with the fact that parental influence begins to wane while peer and societal influence steadily increases. That's not a bad thing—in fact, it's part of the natural maturing process. Your child is now beginning his or her eighth year; Months 84 to 96 are also transitional in your life as a parent as you emphasize important principles to help your child build a lifelong moral compass.



PARENT LEADERSHIP:

You are Your Child's First and Best Teacher

"If we don't shape our kids, they will be shaped by outside forces that don't care what shape our kids are in."—Dr. Louise Hart, author of *The Winning Family: Increasing Self-Esteem in Your Children and Yourself*

Ponder that opening quote from Louise Hart, Ed.D for a moment. She uses the phrase "shape our kids." The Merriam-Webster dictionary lists various meanings for the word "shape," including "to determine or direct the course or character of..."¹ Synonyms include such words as mold, model, and build.

Hart's message is loud and clear: If parents do not shape their kids, outside-the-home forces will! And those outside-the-home forces "don't care what shape our kids are in."

The precept that parents are their child's first and best teacher is a true parenting principle.

With today's information overload, a 24-hour news cycle, and competing ideas on what values to prioritize, it can be hard to know what is right, what is important, and what you should

do as a parent to help your child grow and learn and progress.

It's enough to make a parent want to throw their hands up and check out mentally. But this would be a mistake.

You are your child's parent. You know your child best. Trust your instincts! Outside influences, such as school, sports teams, church classes, or other such activities can be great places to reinforce the noble values, character traits, and virtues you teach at home, as well as great places to gain knowledge and skills.

However, these same outside forces can be places or forces that don't care what shape your child is in. As your child's *first, best, and most influential teacher*, you can instill within in them virtues and noble values, practiced in the home, to act as a permanent moral compass, helping them safely navigate the world around them throughout their life.

As a parent, you are the person most invested in helping your child succeed. So, take the time to teach and learn with your child! We urge you to:

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- **Be involved with your child's school and school-work.** Get to know the teachers and the curriculum being taught. Volunteer in the school if you can. There are often community councils, PTA, and PTO volunteer opportunities. Being involved in your child's school gives you the chance to be aware of what is being taught, how it is being taught, and what the school is focused on. This helps you to know if the school's culture is right for your child and your family.

Note: It is important to know what your child is being taught so you can reinforce skills and knowledge at home, and also so you can monitor and discuss differences between school and home values, methods, and ideas with your child when they arise.



Dr. Hart with her daughter and co-author Kristen. "In Louise's thirteen years as a stay-at-home mom, she learned first-hand about nurturing, protecting, and developing social and emotional well-being at different ages and stages. She enjoyed the opportunity to be fully present to the ups and downs of child development while learning how to be a mother... Although diminished by many as 'just a housewife,' her in-depth experiences have been foundational throughout her life."²

Warning! Watch for red flags: For example, most schools and districts are going to be open with parents and the community about what curriculum they have selected, and will invite parent and community input. They also allow exemptions from some material if a parent feels their child would be better served by learning the skills or knowledge another way: i.e., exempting a child from a "maturation" or sex education lesson in health class because the parent wants to teach their child that information exclusively at home. If a school isn't willing to be transparent with parents about the curriculum, regardless of the topic, that is a **big red flag** which may require a parent to take action, such as insisting on transparency, or finding a school whose values better match those of your family.

CAUTION

- **Discuss what your child is learning and be willing to learn with her.** Encourage your child without doing the work for her. Modeling a growth mindset can help your child learn that hard work will help her improve, even when something is difficult for her. For example:

- ◆ Share with your child when you are struggling with learning a new skill.
- ◆ Talk to her about how you regroup so you can try again with fresh enthusiasm.
- ◆ Talk about the accomplishment you feel when you see small improvements as you try and try again.

You can also point out when your child shares something you hadn't known before, and thank her for teaching you something. Family dinners and Family Hour[®] are great times to share new information and to learn about new topics and ideas together. They are also good opportunities to learn what your child is thinking and what she is learning in school so you can support her as she grows in knowledge and understanding.

- **Read with your child and let him see you reading.** Reading is a great way to expand your child's horizons and understanding of others. Nonfiction books can help him learn new knowledge and skills, and fiction books with protagonists who are different from him help him see things from someone else's perspective, which builds empathy skills. Reading a wide variety of books also helps your child learn new vocabulary words and broadens his perspective. Reading can help your child realize that learning can happen any time—not just in a school setting.

Idea: If you aren't much of a reader yourself but want to encourage your child's reading through your example, try audio books. You are still showing that words and stories and information are important, even if you access it in a different way.

"I vouch for the audio idea! When I grew up in the 1940s and 50s, before TV, great drama was available on the radio. My sister and I would huddle around the radio to listen to audio programs such as *Grand Central Station*, *Let's Pretend*, *The Shadow*, *The Thin Man*, etc. These audio programs took us on fantastic adventures."³

Vibert L. Kesler, Executive Director

- **Discuss your values and perspectives together.** Help your children understand the "why" of your family values and what you believe. Over time, your children will inevitably hear and learn a lot of things that are contrary to your family values, because the world is made up of many different people with many different perspectives, values, and experiences.

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When you foster an atmosphere of love, respect, and open communication in your home, it is easier to talk about these experiences and differences with your child. That way, when your child hears or is taught things that don't seem to fit with what they are learning at home, you can discuss the parts you agree on, the parts you don't, the "why" of where your thoughts on a matter differ, and how to be respectful and kind to others even when you disagree.

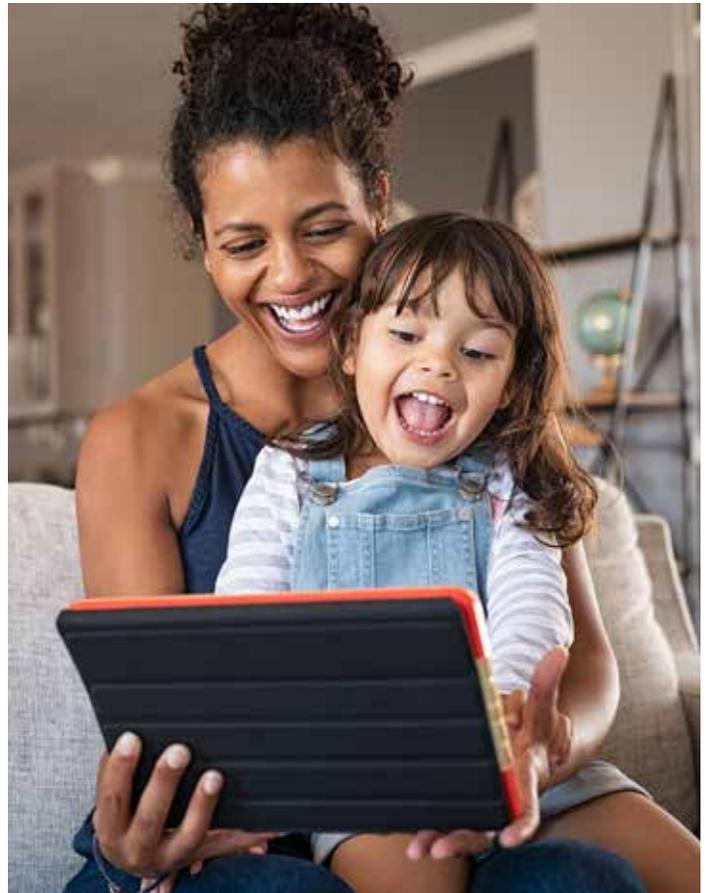
Family Hour® is a great time to teach your children. It gives you a set time in your schedule to focus on your family, which can help you build good habits into your life.

Editor's note: When my children have questions about things they are learning in school—whether it is wanting to know more about a particular animal when they are in kindergarten, or wanting to know more about a historical event than is discussed in a middle school textbook—or when they come across attitudes or beliefs different from the ones taught in our home, we encourage them to come to us.

We then will look up the information together, or discuss the subject they are curious about. We feel that it is our responsibility as parents to help our children put the information they learn into context, so they can understand our viewpoint as well as the viewpoints of others. We talk about the parts we agree on, the parts we don't, and the "why" of where our thoughts on a matter differ. It is all part of the Interpretive Stage, and a great way to share our values and help our children interpret the world around them.

When you take the time to be involved, and to learn and grow together as a family, everyone is strengthened. Being present and involved with your child as you live and teach and encourage her in the values and virtues you hold dear is a powerful way to help her internalize a love of learning, a love for others, and a desire to make good choices. While your child will hopefully have many positive teachers and role models throughout her life, learning starts in the home with you.

What do you want the take-away lessons to be? 



Note from Vibert Kesler, Executive Director:

The COVID-19 pandemic that swept across the world in 2020 brought disruption to every part of people's lives—from shortages at the grocery store to disruptions in work, travel, school, and human relationships—even within families.

But it did cause a lot of parents to slow down, giving them an opportunity to focus on their families, to be involved in their learning, whether that might be reading and writing or moral education, and to be aware of what influences they are accepting into their homes. Knowing what your child is being taught is a key part of being a productive parent. Productive parents are aware of what their child is learning, they are aware of who and what is influencing their child, and they work with their child to help him develop an effective moral compass to guide him throughout his life.

1. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/shape>
2. <https://drloisehart.com/about/>
3. Grand Central Station | Old Time Radio Downloads: <https://www.oldtimeradiodownloads.com/>; Google: Old Time Radio Shows; or find them on Wikipedia.

CHILD CHATTER:

I'm Seven



Child: Can you believe I'm already seven years old?

Parent: It's pretty crazy, that's for sure. The last seven years have gone really slowly and really quickly all at the same time. But I'm so glad I get to be on this journey with you!

Child: I am glad, too! Want to talk about what to expect over the next year in my development?

Parent: Of course! It's always good to have a heads up! As long as we both remember that developmental milestones are more like guidelines.

Child: Definitely. Every kid develops at their own pace. In fact, it's really important to not compare me with others. If you are worried, you can always talk to my pediatrician.

Parent: Good idea! So, what can we expect from your emotional development this year?

Child: My friends are starting to be more important to me. I'm getting better at sharing with others and I am more likely to cooperate with others. I understand teamwork a lot better, too!

Parent: That's great! But why do you still lie or try to cheat sometimes?

Child: It's not fun, I know. But it is normal! I'm trying to figure out where I fit, I'm still learning the difference between right and wrong, and I'm learning what is acceptable and what is not.

Parent: Okay. I will try to keep that in mind as I guide and teach you. I know it is important to let you know that you are loved, even—or maybe especially!—when you are acting unlovable.

Child: Yes! With your help, I will learn to make better choices as you give me consistent boundaries and consequences with love. Even though we started

learning these things when I was a toddler, I need lots of reinforcement as I mature and retest my limits. I won't always get it right, but I will do better with time and your help.

Parent: I know self-esteem starts to be an issue with some kids your age. What can I do to help you?

Child: Remember how we've talked about fostering a growth mindset rather than a fixed mindset before? Well, that's even more important now. If you help me focus on learning good strategies for overcoming difficulties, and help me understand the value of hard work and consistent effort, I will be more likely to have more positive self talk. For example, I will be more likely to remember that just because I can't do something now, it doesn't mean I'll never be able to do it. Encourage my efforts—it helps me to know you are there to support me!

Parent: That's a great idea. I know I feel better about myself when I tell myself things like "Practice makes better," rather than "I'll never be able to understand this."

Child: Exactly! Oh! Some good news—I will probably start developing more empathy for others this year. I am learning how to resolve conflicts a bit better and I am starting to better understand and care about other people's feelings.

Parent: So now is a great time to focus on the values we care about in our family.

Child: Yes! I am more likely to understand why our values are important and I want to help people around me. Since I am definitely working on my internal moral compass these days, learning good values from you will help me interact more positively with the world around me. I won't always get it right, but I am definitely trying!

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Parent: That is wonderful, and I am so proud of you.

Child: I'm glad! I need to know that, because this is a critical time in my life. I need to develop confidence in interacting with other people, in my schoolwork, and in my sense of self, because it gets harder as I get older and start comparing myself with others. If I learn now that I am capable and able to do hard things, then it is more likely that I will keep that confidence when things get hard as I get older.

Parent: Any suggestions on how I can help you with that?

Child: Sure! You can help me set goals for myself. Then I learn to rely more on internal rewards rather than external ones when I achieve my goals. You can also help me continue learning how to respect other people. I learn respect for myself when you show me love and celebrate my efforts.

Parent: I think helping you continue to learn responsibility is also important. It helps you think about consequences, it can give you a sense of accomplishment when you complete a chore, and it can help you feel valued, since your contribution really does matter.



Child: I don't always love doing chores...but I know you are right. Those are important skills I'm learning! You can also help me develop confidence by spending time with me. Play with me! Read with me! When I feel wanted and loved, I feel more confident in my own worth.

Parent: I definitely want you to know that you are loved and valued, so I will do my best to show it. I know your emotions can be volatile sometimes, especially when you spend all day trying to properly self-regulate at school, so I will try to be patient and understanding when that happens, too.

Child: I'm so glad that you recognize that you are my safe place, where I feel comfortable letting go, even when the torrent of emotions I'm expressing are uncomfortable or frustrating for you sometimes. I am glad to have parents who love me so much and try their best!

Parent: I love you too! Any last bits of information you want to share?

Child: Oooh, yes! I'm learning a lot and I'm excited to learn. So please foster that love of learning by answering my questions when you can, and helping me to find the answers when you don't know them. Learning to think and inquire and ask questions helps me to be better at critical thinking as I get older, and it helps me better understand myself, other people, and the world around me.

Parent: I will do my best!

Child: Thanks, Mom and Dad! 

Information sourced from:

- <https://www.webmd.com/parenting/guide/child-at-7-milestones#1>
- <https://www.verywellfamily.com/7-year-old-developmental-milestones-620704>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/positiveparenting/middle.html>
- <https://www.greatschools.org/gk/articles/developmental-milestones-your-7-year-old-child/>

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LOOK FOR THESE
EXCITING FEATURES
AND ARTICLES**

**VIRTUE GUARD:
Trustworthiness**

**FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS:
Respecting Each Other**

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