

Tips for Parents by Susie Kohl

A Neighborly New World for Parents

RECENTLY I WAS TOUCHED to see how two neighbors stepped forward to help one of our mothers who has been worried about the extent of her child's speech delay. One called to get the child an appointment with a well-known specialist. Another volunteered to use her speech-therapy background to help the child in any way. In an ideal world, all neighbors would be this friendly and self-giving. In fact, people everywhere would recognize the importance of offering parents respect, empathy, and assistance with the hard job of childrearing today.

Parents themselves are setting new patterns of cooperation and support. They are forming play groups, babysitting coops, and groups to educate and offer resources to parents whose children have special needs. Everyday examples of reaching out to help other parents abound. When one of our teachers had twins, friends volunteered to take care of the babies during the night while the new parents built up some needed rest. Parents also stretch themselves to offer information on-line—advice on every topic from getting children to sleep through the night to choosing the right preschool.

Imagine your own version of an ideal world for parents. In-laws would compliment you on raising their grandchildren in such an informed way. Capable teenage neighbors would ask for the privilege of playing with your children to give you time to run errands or even take a nap. People living on the same block would confer on how to make the children living there feel like family. Out in the world, passersby would stop to help you when your baby was crying or your tired child was having a tantrum, asking “Can I help you put your groceries in the car?” or complimenting you on maintaining your cool. Thinking about support that would change your parenting life can help you step up in situations where you might help others—an exhausted mom who needs a little sleep, a single father who would benefit from friends.

The most impressive aspect of parents helping other parents, even those they don't know, is creativity and insight into what others need. The honesty and openness in chat rooms and childrearing networks break down old competitive attitudes with people vying to have the smartest, best-behaved, or most athletic child.

Parents aid others and themselves with honesty and innovative ways to share. Our Founders Day Faire Saturday was the result of parent inspiration, collaboration, and generosity. In May The Meher Schools will host another Saranap Community Association Toy & Clothing Boutique. There people can donate and pick up clothing, toys, and books that they or a friend might need. Parents are eager to share, and only need new opportunities like these to reach out to one another.

Our community, blessed with such an abundance of knowledge, material resources, and good will, should set examples for meeting parents' needs in the future.

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