

## **Back to School**

**The emotional quality of your relationships with your children is essential for how well they are doing in school.**

**By Irene Hansen Savarese, M.S., L.M.H.C.**

As parents we are naturally concerned about how well our children are doing in school. We work long hours and spend a considerable amount of time and money to ensure the best education for our children in hopes that they'll get straight A's leading to well paying jobs. We often assume money and status equals happiness and forget to give our children the most important skill of all; the skill of connecting to others in meaningful ways.

Emotional skills are the foundation for how well we connect with other people; however, emotional skills are also the foundation in academic performance such as the capacity for abstract thinking and problem solving.

In a newborn child, feelings come before thoughts. "It is the emotional quality of the relationship you have with your baby that will stimulate his or her brain for optimum emotional and intellectual growth."\*

How do you ensure that your children develop emotional skills such as passion for learning and the ability to process, understand and experience emotions?

It starts at home with you. How well you are able to emotionally connect to your children is in fact predicting how well they are going to perform outside of the home. Time spent with your children is worth more than anything else you may choose to invest in.

### **Ideas to connect with your child on an emotional level:**

Get to know your child's thoughts and feelings. Pay attention to what is communicated. Know your child's concerns and fears, hopes and dreams. Validate your child's feelings. "I can see/hear/understand that you are really upset about what happened" Avoid remarks like: "That's no big deal!" or "You shouldn't feel that way!" These kinds of remarks imply that you don't take your child's emotion seriously. The process of expressing and naming a feeling, takes away its power to control your child.

Help your child recover from shameful and embarrassing experiences. Extended periods of shame result in your child learning to shut down emotionally.

Spend time together. Be available. When you are together you are more likely to get the information you need. Communicate genuine interest in figuring out how your child thinks and feels.

Communicate your own thoughts and feelings in an age appropriate way. If you are having problems in your life, your child already knows that something is going on. Your child is better off knowing what it is, so that you can deal with it together.

Be aware of your expectations. What you want for your child may not be what your child wants.

Be especially aware of your moods and how you deal with emotions like anger and sadness. How you deal with own emotions and your child's emotions affects their well-being and academic performance in and out of school.

(\*Citation from Joanna Lipari in *Psychology Today* Aug. 2000, p. 40)

*Irene Hansen Savarese is a Licensed Mental Health Counselor in Private Practice in Fort Lauderdale. Educated in Denmark as a Clinical Psychologist, she has years of experience as a Psychotherapist in Denmark and Florida. She specializes in Crisis Intervention, Eating Disorders, Personal Growth / Empowerment and Women's Issues. She works with Individuals, Couples, Families and Groups. Please direct questions regarding this article to her office at 954-776-0406, Ext 3 or email at: [irenesavarese@yahoo.com](mailto:irenesavarese@yahoo.com). For more information go to [www.irenesavarese.com](http://www.irenesavarese.com).*