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Rearing Children in
Love & Righteousness:
Latitude, Limits, & Love

THE First Presidency (1999) counsels parents to “devote their best efforts to the teaching and rearing of their children in gospel principles which will keep them close to the Church,” and further states that “no other instrumentality can take [the home’s] place or fulfill its essential functions in carrying forward this God-given responsibility.” The proclamation on the family supports parents in magnifying their divinely designed responsibilities in the Father’s great plan of happiness (see Alma 42:8) by specifically identifying the principles that ultimately will make the most difference in their efforts.

In this chapter, we discuss three parenting principles rooted in the doctrines of the proclamation and substantiated by social science research. The first principle is based on the fundamental doctrine that “each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and as such, each has a divine nature and destiny” (First Presidency, para. 2), and that through this mortal experience each will have an opportunity to use agency “to progress toward perfection and ultimately realize their divine destiny as heirs of eternal life” (para. 3). A parent can take the primary role in helping children and teens learn to make wise choices through *granting appropriate levels of latitude* based on an understanding of their individual differences and developmental levels.

The second principle is related to this teaching process. Parents instruct children in the ways of the Lord by *setting reasonable limits* and appropriately enforcing them. The proclamation describes this function by stating that “parents have a sacred duty . . . to teach [children] to . . . observe the commandments of God, and be law-abiding citizens wherever they live.” Granting latitude and setting limits always works best in the context of the third principle, the development of a *strong parent-child bond* expressed in loving relationships that helps children be more disposed to positive parental influence. As stated in the proclamation, parents “have a sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness” (First Presidency, para. 6).

Parenting scholarship and research confirm that latitude (or autonomy granting), limits (or regulation), and love (or connection) are the chief characteristics of what scholars refer to as the *authoritative parenting* style. A parenting style reflects the emotional and interactional climate created in the home by the behavioral practices parents typically use in relating to their children. Decades of research comparing the authoritative parenting style to other common styles, such as the coercive (or authoritarian) style, the permissive (or *laissez-faire*) style, or the neglectful style, demonstrate clearly that children and adolescents reared by authoritative parents tend to be better adjusted to school, less aggressive and delinquent, less likely to abuse drugs, more friendly and accepted by peers, and more communicative, self-motivated, academically inclined, and willing to abide by laws. They are also more capable of moral reasoning and are more self-controlled (Hart, Newell, & Olson, 2003). Additionally, research demonstrates these positive child outcomes to be associated with authoritative parenting across gender, socioeconomic status, and culture. Nonformulaic by nature, authoritative parenting principles can be adapted to gender, personalities, and individual needs of children and teens in families with various heritage and cultural backgrounds.

As parents seek to learn their duties and apply correct principles in their parenting responsibilities within their own families, they will find their efforts resulting in a closer association with the Holy Spirit, increased sanctification in their own souls, and a greater measure of happiness in their own

lives. President Gordon B. Hinckley (1997) said, “Of all the joys of life, none other equals that of happy parenthood. Of all the responsibilities with which we struggle, none other is so serious. To rear children in an atmosphere of love, security, and faith is the most rewarding of all challenges. The good result from such efforts becomes life’s most satisfying compensation” (p. 421).

In examining latitude, limits, and love, this chapter will provide a discussion of the doctrinal foundation, scholarly support, and practical application of each of these three foundational parenting principles. In practice, these three elements often seamlessly overlap, though each makes a separate positive contribution to childrearing, especially when applied in a balanced manner appropriate to circumstances and child temperamental characteristics.

Certainly, the best example of the application of these principles is found in the manner in which our Heavenly Father parents each of us as his children. As taught by the proclamation, our Eternal Father has demonstrated his deep interest in our possibilities by allowing his children to exercise the God-given gift of agency, allowing us *latitude* in this mortal existence to gain a mortal body and learn through our own experiences. To keep us directed back to our heavenly home, God has introduced *limits* or commandments, along with “sacred ordinances and covenants available in holy temples [that] make it possible for individuals to return to the presence of God and for families to be united eternally” (First Presidency, para. 3). Finally, the entire gospel plan is based upon our Father’s *love*, with its central feature of the Atonement of Jesus Christ standing as a powerful reminder of God’s belief in each individual’s potential to inherit his greatest gift—eternal life (see D&C 14:7). Each of these principles—latitude, limits, and love—will be discussed in turn.

Latitude

Fundamental to granting latitude in authoritative parenting is an understanding of the divine principle of agency and an appreciation of the unique personality and individualized needs of children. When children are taught true doctrine, internalize correct principles, and have opportunities to make

choices within an environment of unfailing love and concern and with sensitivity to their developmental level, they are more likely to learn to choose wisely (Ballard, 2006; Wilson, 2012). Whatever the nature and disposition of a given child, wise parents work to adjust, relate to, and rear each child in a manner that is attuned to individual needs. As President James E. Faust (1990) observed, “Child rearing is so individualistic. Every child is different and unique. What works with one may not work with another” (p. 34). Individualizing the amount of latitude granted to each child in matters of both behavior and thinking should be based upon their dispositions, needs, age, and temperament. Children, in turn, will be more open to parental input and direction in the positive emotional climate that is created as needs are better met with more individualized approaches. President Brigham Young encouraged parents to “study their [children’s] dispositions and temperaments, and deal with them accordingly” (Widtsoe, 1978, p. 207). In making important decisions about granting latitude, both spiritual perspectives and scholarly findings can be helpful as parents understand more about how agency interacts with individual personalities, genetic traits, and environmental influences.

Respecting Agency and Spiritual Personality

Latter-day Saint theology includes a remarkable wealth of information about the influence of the premortal life. For example, the First Presidency stated, “All people who come to this earth and are born in mortality, had a pre-existent, spiritual personality, as the sons and daughters of the Eternal Father” (Smith, Lund, & Penrose, 1912, p. 417). President Joseph F. Smith (1916) noted, “Notwithstanding this fact that our recollection of former things was taken away, the character of our lives in the spirit world has much to do with our disposition, desires and mentality here in mortal life” (p. 426). Regarding the cultivation of spiritual gifts, Elder Bruce R. McConkie (1979) stated, “Being subject to law, and having their agency, all the spirits of men, while yet in the Eternal Presence, developed aptitudes, talents, capacities, and abilities of every sort, kind, and degree. During the long expanse of life which



Each individual displays different interests, personalities, and behaviors through unique biological blueprints provided by parents coupled with the child's own spiritual predispositions, talents, and desires. © Benis Arapovic.

then was, an infinite variety of talents and abilities came into being” (p. 23). Certainly, the way individual children respond to their earthly environments is greatly influenced by their spiritual identity and the spiritual gifts cultivated as an expression of their agency in the premortal realm (see D&C 46; Alma 13:3–5; Abraham 3:22–23; Moroni 10; Moses 5:24; 1 Corinthians 12–14).

Indeed, each individual displays different interests, personalities, and behavior through unique biological blueprints provided by parents coupled with the child's own spiritual predispositions, talents, and desires. These spiritual traits interact with genetic individuality in ways that are often observed in daily interactions in the home (Hart, 2008). Without a doubt, an individual's characteristics are further refined by environmental factors in and out of the home (such as, parents, peers, siblings, school, and culture) and by the ways that children respond to them (Hart, Newell, & Olson, 2003). In

fact, even among children in the same family, some children may be more difficult or easy to rear due, in part, to inherent personality characteristics that stem from spiritual, biological, or social-emotional predispositions.

As President David O. McKay (1953) noted, “Man has a dual nature: one, related to the earthly or animal life; the other, akin to the Divine” (p. 347). Some biological or genetic tendencies may make up part of the “natural man” that must be overcome throughout life. Children come from the heavenly realm and are born into a world beset with temptations for the “natural man,” but also full of spiritual opportunities for growth towards the “divine” (Mosiah 3:19). Helping children learn to use their agency wisely in cultivating divine attributes happens in a bidirectional parent-child interaction process that plays out across development.

We now turn our attention to overviews of research literature that offer social science support for fundamental doctrines that shed light on principles for raising children and teens in optimal ways. Since this chapter is not designed to overview individual studies and associated methodologies, readers are encouraged to examine endnote academic sources that synthesize multitudes of scientific findings supporting the points that follow (see Bornstein & Lamb, 2011; Hart, Newell, & Olson, 2003; Eisenberg, 2006; Kuczynski, 2003; Smith & Hart, 2011; Hart, Newell, & Haupt, 2008; Hart, Newell, & Sine, 2000; Hart, Newell, & Haupt, 2012).

Understanding Genetics and Environmental Influences

In addition to our understanding of the influence of spiritual personality, a growing body of evidence suggests that biological characteristics play a role in children’s dispositions and temperaments in ways that interact with environmental influences. These include biologically driven tendencies toward inhibition or shyness, sociability, impulsiveness and “thrill seeking,” activity level (degree of lively energetic behavior and perpetual motion), aggression, cognition and language acuity, behavior problems stemming from psychiatric disorders, emotionality (for example, intensity of arousal related to fear,

anger, or elation), and religiosity. Evidence also exists to show that different genetically based characteristics can turn on or turn off at different points in development in ways that may be partially influenced by environmental factors. Thus, it may well be that some children cycle in and out of more easy and difficult developmental periods as they grow.

All this can influence how parents and children respond to each other. For example, some children with more spirited dispositions (such as aggressive, highly emotional, or thrill-seeking tendencies) may raise concerns and evoke more formal intervention by parents in terms of rules, redirection, punishment, and monitoring than children who are “easier” to rear. This can be particularly true when child behavior falls outside cultural norms and family expectations. Thus, even though there are shared parenting influences, children by their very natures can foster different parenting behaviors for different siblings in the same family. Or they may respond to similar parenting practices in different ways depending on how experiences are filtered through their perceptions and past experiences. Even children understand that parents adjust their practices to the different needs and personality characteristics of their siblings.

Research exploring genetic contributions to children’s development suggests that as an expression of their individual personalities and agency, children select, modify, and even create their own environments influenced by these biological predispositions (Plomin, Reiss, Hetherington, & Howe, 1994). For example, a more sociable child may by nature seek out opportunities to interact with peers, but may be less academically motivated. Alternatively, a more socially passive child in the same family may actively avoid social gatherings and prefer to spend time in solitary activities (such as reading or drawing) and be more academically inclined. Sensitive parents watch carefully and recognize ways to help children constructively build talents and abilities, learn to make wise choices, and provide as much latitude as they can responsibly manage.

By contrast, minimizing latitude can have serious consequences for children, as in the case of overprotective parents. For example, recent studies show that temperamentally shy and inhibited children are more likely to



Children's development is influenced by their individual personalities, agency, and genetic make-up. Sensitive parents watch carefully and recognize ways to help children constructively build their talents and abilities. Christina Smith, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

withdraw from peer group interaction when their parents are overprotective (Nelson et al., 2006b). It is often a natural tendency for parents to “protect” their children from failure in social relationships when they perceive their child is having difficulty engaging in ongoing peer group activities. However, this usually has the opposite effect in that it does not allow children opportunities to develop critical social skills that can only be developed through interactions with peers.

Granting Latitude

Many practical applications may be suggested to parents for ways they can respect individuality, guide behavior, and assist children to make wise choices in behavior and attitude. Granting latitude refers not only to behavioral dimensions (such as deciding whether to study for a test or to attend a basketball game), but also to psychological autonomy (exploring their own thoughts and opinions that may be different from their parents). Elder Larry Y. Wilson (2012) stated, “Wise parents prepare their children to get along without them. They provide opportunities for growth as children acquire the spiritual maturity to exercise their agency properly” (p. 104). While many examples could be given that would be considered clearly authoritative, the following are a few suggestions of practical ways to apply the concept of latitude to parenting:

Giving choices and respecting individuality. Children benefit from being given many choices and appropriate levels of latitude to make their own decisions in a variety of domains whenever possible (for example, a teen is allowed to choose whether to complete chores in the morning or afternoon; a young child chooses a jacket or sweater on a fall afternoon). Elaborating upon this practice, Elder M. Russell Ballard (2006) stated, “Parents need to give children choices and should be prepared to appropriately adjust some rules, thus preparing children for real-world situations” (p. 32).

In the behavioral realm, supporting children’s autonomy in this manner whenever possible helps them view adults as providers of information and guidance rather than as deliverers of messages of control. Parental communication



Children need opportunities during their formative years to begin taking ownership and solving problems, with the assistance of their parents. © Racorn.

is open and nonjudgmental, with more emphasis on listening and completely understanding before talking. In the psychological realm, respect for authority and independent thinking are valued and not viewed as being mutually exclusive. Research has shown that children are more likely to be respectful to parents and others when there is reciprocity and a degree of power sharing, negotiation, and compromise in their relationships with parents (Dumas, LaFreniere, & Serketich, 1995; Pettit & Lollis, 1997; Siqueland, Kendall, & Steinberg, 1996). Conversations that demonstrate a genuine regard and respect for others' opinions can send the message that individuals are valued, despite differences that may exist in opinions and beliefs.

Saying yes more often than no. Sister Marjorie Hinckley said, "I tried hard never to say 'no' if I could possibly say 'yes.' I think that worked well because it gave my children the feeling that I trusted them and they were responsible to do the best they could" (Pearce, 1999, p. 55). A daughter of President Heber J. Grant shared the following insights: "In matters of small importance, father seldom said 'no' to us. Consequently, when he did say 'no,' we knew he meant it. His training allowed us to make our own decisions



Overprotective parenting does not prepare children and teens adequately to learn from their own experiences and gain the skills needed to face challenges and effectively solve personal problems. © Larisa Lofitskaya.

whenever possible. He always explained very patiently just why he thought a certain procedure was unwise and then he would say, ‘That’s the way I feel about it; but of course, you must decide for yourself.’ As a result, our decision was usually the same as his. He was able somehow to motivate us to want to do the right thing rather than to be forced to do it” (*Teachings . . . Heber J. Grant*, 2002, p. 200).

Allowing children to take responsibility. Children need opportunities during their formative years to begin taking ownership and solving problems, with the assistance of their parents. However, too much assistance by parents who hover or try too hard to protect children and teens from facing problems and consequences of their decisions can interrupt this process. While this type of overprotective parenting (what some have called “helicopter parenting”) may cushion life’s difficult experiences, it does not prepare children and teens adequately to learn from their own experiences and to gain needed skills in facing challenges and effectively solving personal problems.

Likewise, continually forcing parental points of view usually does not result in children and teens being able to learn how to make good choices and take responsibility for their decisions. What are parents to do when a child adopts an attitude, behavior, or opinion that is unacceptable? Balancing the provision of appropriate psychological autonomy (that is willingness to respect and encourage autonomous thinking, attitudes, opinions, and perceptions) with appropriate behavioral control (active monitoring and regulation of activities and associations) is a delicate and challenging area for parents. It requires discernment, inspiration, and action that usually play out in different ways depending on the individual nature and disposition of each child and teen.

Elder Robert D. Hales (1999) gave wise counsel to parents who are dealing with these situations: “Act with faith; don’t react with fear. When our teenagers begin testing family values, parents need to go to the Lord for guidance on the specific needs of each family member. This is the time for added love and support and to reinforce your teachings on how to make choices. It is frightening to allow our children to learn from the mistakes they may make, but their willingness to choose the Lord’s way and family values is greater when the choice comes from within than when we attempt to force those values upon them. The Lord’s way of love and acceptance is better than Satan’s way of force and coercion, especially in rearing teenagers” (p. 34).

Unfortunately, some children, despite gospel-centered teaching in the home, will use their agency to make decisions that take them far from parental values. In these cases, good judgment is needed to strike the right balance between love and law. Elder Dallin H. Oaks (2009) said:

If parents have a wayward child—such as a teenager indulging in alcohol or drugs—they face a serious question. Does parental love require that these substances or their consumption be allowed in the home, or do the requirements of civil law or the seriousness of the conduct or the interests of other children in the home require that this be forbidden?

To pose an even more serious question, if an adult child is living in cohabitation, does the seriousness of sexual relations outside the bonds of marriage require that this child feel the full weight of family disapproval by being excluded from any family contacts, or does parental love require that the fact of cohabitation be ignored? I have seen both of these extremes, and I believe that both are inappropriate.

Where do parents draw the line? That is a matter for parental wisdom, guided by the inspiration of the Lord. There is no area of parental action that is more needful of heavenly guidance or more likely to receive it than the decisions of parents in raising their children and governing their families. (p. 28)

Because authoritative parenting implies flexibility in dealing with the unique disposition of each child, this style is more effective than the others in dealing with children who use their agency unwisely. Judiciously keeping doors open for children who stray and experience ensuing negative consequences often results in eventual reawakenings to earlier parental teachings, helping them take responsibility for their actions and take the steps that are needed to get on course. In addition to family and loved ones, friends and ward members who have provided earlier positive influence can often be instrumental in assisting individuals who are making their way back into the fold.

Assist children and teens to adopt religious faith. One of the most powerful tools that parents have in teaching their children positive values and helping them build a foundation for making good moral choices is their religious faith (Smith, 2005; Dean, 2010). Providing opportunities for children and teens to have spiritual awakenings in the home through religious practices and traditions (which are elaborated later in this chapter) increases the likelihood that they will actively seek to be engaged in a religious community. Research demonstrates that youth activities and religious education provide opportunities for moral discussion and civic engagement in ways that help youth think beyond themselves and consider the needs of others (King &

Furrow, 2004). In addition, adolescents who embrace a religious community are more likely to exhibit behavior that is consistent with positive moral values. They are more involved in activities that help the less fortunate and in community service that reflects a concern for others, compared to non-affiliated youth (Kerestes, Youniss, & Metz, 2004).

Religious involvement fosters better academic performance and prosocial behavior (acting out of a desire to put the needs of others before self) and discourages misconduct as well (Dowling et al., 2004). It is also associated with less delinquent behavior, including lower levels of sexual activity and drug and alcohol use (Bahr & Hoffman, 2010; Smith, 2005; Regnerus, Smith, & Fritsch, 2003). Religious activity provides young people with expanded networks of exemplary, religiously oriented adults and peers—conditions that also provide opportunities for internalizing important values that help children and teens override temptations that stem from biological urges or negative peer group pressure (Bridges & Moore, 2002; Jang & Johnson, 2001). In actuality, the quality of the parent-child relationship more often determines the type of peers that teenagers choose and whether they accept and adhere to parental values (Furman, Simon, Shaffer, & Bouchey, 2002; Laird, Pettit, Bates, & Dodge, 2003; Zhou, et al., 2002). In short, religious practices and traditions create conditions that engender greater moral maturity and help to provide a foundation for making good choices.

Limits

While providing latitude that can enhance the probability that children become independent and learn to use their agency wisely, parents also need to set limits around their children's and teens' exposure and access to influences that could bring them emotional, physical, and spiritual harm (such as early dating, inappropriate media, and immodest dress). These limits, accompanying reasons, and expectations for abiding by them are best taught in the home and can provide a foundation for children and teens to make good decisions when they are away from home (Walker, Fraser, & Harper, 2012).



The quality of the parent-child relationship more often determines the type of peers that teenagers choose and whether they accept and adhere to parental values. © Goodluz.

Responsibility for decision making is usually granted within acceptable parameters set by parents, and parental oversight might be relaxed as children mature and consistently make good choices (such as allowing decisions among appropriate media and peer group activities with continued monitoring but less direct parental involvement over time). However, these limits may sometimes need to be retightened in a spirit of love and concern in order to provide reminders of parental expectations when trust and confidence need to be re-earned, such as in situations where decisions leading to potential harm have been made (for example, friends talking a teen into trying an alcoholic drink at a late-night party) (Kerr, Stattin, & Ozdemir, 2012; Baumrind, Larzelere, & Owens, 2010). How far to go with what researchers refer to as *confrontive discipline* that is firm, direct, clear, and consistent in these kinds of situations requires careful discernment as noted earlier in the counsel from Elder Hales about acting with faith rather than reacting with fear (Baumrind, 2012).

Clearly, children need limits as well as frequent reassurance of their parents' love and confidence in them so that they are more open to parental teaching, guidance, and correction when necessary. President Brigham Young (1864) counseled, "Kind looks, kind actions, kind words, and a lovely, holy deportment towards them will bind our children to us with bands that cannot be easily broken; while abuse and unkindness will drive them from us." In fact, research underscores the sensitive nature of the parent-child relationship in findings demonstrating that whether children feel acceptance or rejection by parents has an impact on their psychological adjustment and desire to adhere to parental expectations and limits (Khaleque & Rohner, 2002). President Spencer W. Kimball (1982) taught, "Setting limits to what [children] can do means to th[ose] child[ren] that you love . . . and respect [them]" (p. 341). Warm and responsive parenting tends to promote lasting bonds with parents and "felt security" within children (Hart, Newell, & Olson, 2003), especially as parents have important conversations with their children and follow through with needed consequences in an appropriate manner. This, in turn, has a greater possibility of producing long-term change and has been linked to better behavior at the time and in the future.

While love is surely foundational to all successful approaches to human relationships, our Heavenly Father's example demonstrates not the dichotomy but the harmony that exists in an approach that emphasizes both high standards of conduct and high support. Indeed, this kind of warm and responsive child rearing mitigates hostility, resentment, feelings of rejection, and anger in children, all of which have been admonished in holy writ through the ages. "Provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). In order to achieve such ends, parents require wisdom greater than their own by obtaining the Lord's help in making decisions about correcting misbehavior in a spirit of love. This loving context helps the children or teens achieve greater maturity and increase their ability to conform their lives to socially acceptable standards and to the commandments of God.

Seeking Guidance from the Spirit

Seeking guidance from the Spirit will assist parents in finding ways to discipline children and adolescents in a context of love, respect, consistency, fairness, and sensitivity. When the child has been corrected in a calm, controlled manner, that same Spirit which prompted the response can create a sense of compassion, charity, and forgiveness towards the child. Parents can remember that power and influence is righteously used when it is characterized by "persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, . . . by love unfeigned[,] by kindness, and pure knowledge" (D&C 121:41–42). President Hinckley (1999) stated: "Rear [your children] in love. You don't have to kick them around. You don't have to get angry with them. You just have to love them. If they make mistakes, forgive them and help them to avoid a repetition" (p. 4). In order to properly affirm a righteous course of action under the stress and anxiety that often accompany a child's misbehavior, several considerations are helpful.

First, maintain composure and perspective. President Young observed, "I have seen more parents who were unable to control themselves than I



Confrontive discipline requires careful discernment. Act with faith instead of reacting with fear. Welden C. Andersen, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

ever saw who were unable to control their children” (*Teachings . . . Brigham Young*, 1997, p. 338). Often, sincere prayer and pondering are important ways to seek the support of the Spirit in controlling one’s emotions in order to address the offense without giving offense. Children depend upon their parents to provide an example of emotional control and to be reasonable and responsive at all times—in other words, parents need to be at their best, even when children are at their worst. As President David O. McKay (1955) observed, “Children are more influenced by sermons you act than by sermons you preach” (p. 26).

Second, take a moment to evaluate the situation and what is at stake. What is causing the misbehavior? Is there an opportunity to teach? Is this a mountain or a molehill? Addressing the core problem and avoiding the temptation to react irritably to difficult or annoying behavior can bring parents more quickly to an effective intervention. For example, poor behavior may be tied to an *unfulfilled need* (being tired, hungry, or bored), a *stage of growth* (teething or the natural striving for autonomy during the toddler stage and again during the teenage years), *the present environment* (friends being mean; fear of the dark at bedtime; academic or peer-group struggles), or a *lack of information* (not yet understanding that friends are not happy when one refuses to share). In each of these cases, a quick, fix-it-all strategy, such as time-out or physical punishment may not be appropriate. Deliberate, repeated misbehavior is a better candidate for invoking a negative consequence. Meanwhile, misguided or immature behaviors may be better remedied in a more common sense manner that matches the need; that is, through teaching and listening and reasoning, meeting needs, or helping a child cope with a challenging situation.

Third, when punishment is warranted, use the mildest form of punishment likely to be effective. Speaking of the Savior, President J. Reuben Clark Jr. said, “I feel that [the Savior] will give that punishment which is the very least that our transgression will justify. . . . I believe that when it comes to making the rewards for our good conduct, he will give us the maximum that it is possible to give” (cited in Faust, 2001, p. 19). For

example, depending on their nature, some children might respond quickly to a reminder for better behavior, while others might need a more serious consequence as incentive to change or increase their awareness of the seriousness of the infraction.

Fourth, and finally, as the scripture admonishes, let love follow the punishment, “showing forth afterwards an increase of love toward him whom thou hast reproved” (D&C 121:43). Although it can be very difficult at times, sincerely striving to keep the Spirit during disciplinary encounters will elevate the peace and security in the home while providing an environment more conducive to improved behavior. Parenting with the Spirit will help families avoid the coercive or permissive practices that often destroy peace, strain relationships, and ultimately create negative outcomes for the child.

Avoiding Coercion or Permissiveness

Compared to the authoritative style of parenting, frequent use of coercive parenting practices, including physical punishment and psychological control, invite a host of difficulties to child adjustment. This style is characterized by homes where there is a climate of hostility manifested by frequent spanking, yelling, criticizing, and forcing in ways that are dictatorial and arbitrarily imposed. This style of parenting has been linked to many forms of antisocial, withdrawn, and delinquent behaviors in children and adolescents (Hart, Newell, & Olson, 2003). Prophets have particularly discouraged the overuse of physical punishment. For example, President Young stated, “I will here say to parents, that kind words and loving actions toward children will subdue their uneducated nature a great deal better than the rod, or, in other words, than physical punishment” (*Teachings . . . Brigham Young*, 1997, p. 337). “Let the child have a mild training until it has judgment and sense to guide it. I differ with Solomon’s recorded saying as to spoiling the child by sparing the rod” (Young, 1956, p. 196).

President Hinckley (1994) echoed this sentiment when he said, “I have never accepted the principle of ‘spare the rod and spoil the child.’ . . . Children

don't need beating. They need love and encouragement" (p. 53). Some research shows that coercive tactics may result in immediate or short-term compliance. For example, one or two non abusive, mild slaps on the buttocks in limited situations, such as out-of-control children that pose danger to themselves or others, can be beneficial as a last resort, but only for younger children. However, other research indicates that even though limited spanking may immediately stop a child from misbehaving and willfully defying in the short term, it actually increases the likelihood of greater disobedience and antisocial behavior later on and is more likely to be done in parental anger. This approach also models physical aggression and could come at a steep cost to the parent-child relationship and children's self-regulation (Baumrind et al., 2010; Gershoff & Bitensky, 2007; MacKenzie, Nicklas, Waldfogel, and Brooks-Gunn, 2013).

In support of the view that sparing the rod is a better approach, the scriptural metaphor of a good shepherd and the importance of his rod reminds us that he guides his sheep by gathering the lambs in his arms, carrying them in his bosom, and gently leading them along (see Isaiah 40:11). The shepherd's rod is never used for beating sheep, else the passage "thy rod and thy staff . . . comfort me" (Psalm 23:4) makes little sense. It is used instead to ward off intruders; to count sheep as they "pass under the rod" (see Ezekiel 20:37; Leviticus 27:32); to part the wool to examine for defects, disease, or wounds; and to nudge sheep gently from going in the wrong direction. The rod is viewed as a protection and is also translated from the Hebrew in other places as "the word of God" or "the rod of his mouth" or "the voice of his mouth" (see Micah 6:9; Isaiah 11:4; 1 Nephi 15:23–24; Psalm 23:4).

Accordingly, there are alternate ways one can choose to read the scriptures that appear to support the view that "sparing the rod will spoil the child." For example, Proverbs 13:24 states, "He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes." One might choose to read this as, "They who withhold the word of God hateth their children: They who loveth their children, correct (or teach) them early on (when they are young)." And Proverbs 23:13–14, "Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat

him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell,” one might choose to read as, “Withhold not correction from children; for if you regulate them with the word of God, they will not die. Regulate your children with the word of God, and you will deliver their souls from hell.”

Psychological control is a coercive approach designed to manipulate children’s psychological and emotional experience and expression, and it has been associated with children’s “externalizing” (that is, aggressive, disruptive, or delinquent behavior) and “internalizing” (anxiety or depression) disorders in childhood and adolescence (Barber & Olsen, 1997; Barber, Mingzhu, Olsen, McNeely, & Bose, 2012). Parents who use psychologically controlling behaviors may communicate disrespect to a child or teen. This can be done by conveying a lack of interest in what a child is saying, invalidating or discounting a child’s feelings, or attacking the child in a condescending or patronizing way. They may also seek to control or manipulate the child through love withdrawal, through shaming, through erratic emotional behavior, or by creating unwarranted guilt (“If you do this, you will make me feel like I’m a bad parent and embarrass me in front of the neighbors”). In particular, love withdrawal (angrily refusing to talk to or look at a child after he or she misbehaves) is especially damaging to the delicate nature of the parent-child relationship (Nelson, Hart, Yang, Olsen, & Jin, 2006a; Nelson, Yang, Coyne, Olsen, & Hart, 2013). Wise parents follow the Lord’s example of continuous love by assuring their children that “[their] hand[s] are] stretched out still” (Isaiah 5:25).

Commonly in our day, by contrast, the permissive style of parenting focuses on high warmth combined with low expectations for mature child behavior. As a result, parents may overindulge children, neglect them by leaving them to their own devices, or provide inconsistent and confusing messages about what behavior is acceptable and unacceptable. Accordingly, President Ezra Taft Benson (1970) stated, “Permissive parents are part of the problem” (p. 22). Although permissive parents exert a degree of control over their children, they do so to a lesser degree than coercive and authoritative parents (Baumrind, 1996). For example, permissive parents tend to avoid using their authority to control their children’s behavior, are

tolerant of children's impulses (including aggression), encourage children to make their own decisions without providing necessary limits, refrain from imposing structure on children's time (that is, bedtime, mealtime, TV watching), and keep consequences for misbehavior at a minimum.

Social science research suggests that children raised by permissive parents may have greater difficulty respecting others, coping with frustration, delaying their gratification for a greater goal, and following through with their plans. Children of permissive parents have been found to be often quite social and to have a low rate of internalized problems (for example, depression and anxiety), but they tend to do poorly in academics, are more defiant of authority figures, and have a higher rate of adolescent sexual activity and drug and alcohol use. In sum, research has shown that authoritative parenting, in contrast to coercive parenting and permissive parenting, increases the probability of positive child developmental outcomes (Larzelere, Morris, & Harrist, 2013; Barber & Olsen, 1997; Hart, Newell, & Olsen, 2003; Eisenberg, 2006; Kuczynski, 2003; Smith & Hart, 2011).

Because authoritative parenting implies flexibility, this style is more effective than the others in dealing with children, since each child has unique characteristics and varying temperamental dispositions. For example, some teenagers are self-motivated to engage in appropriate activities, do not require curfews, and are home at reasonable hours. Other teens, without restrictions, lose control of their lives and wander onto dangerous paths. When authoritative practices are consistently used, each child and teen is guided in a balanced style of latitude, limits, and love that best matches his or her unique set of strengths and weaknesses.

Setting and Enforcing Appropriate Limits

Actively and skillfully employing authoritative parenting practices requires parents to work diligently in managing the many day-to-day decisions that are required to help children meet high expectations in a loving environment. While it may be quick and easy to select a particular consequence



Occasional extra privileges can encourage good performance and build strong relationships between parents and children. © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

that applies to almost every wrongdoing, authoritative parents recognize that with each disciplinary encounter, they have an opportunity to teach, train, and socialize the child towards more socially acceptable standards. They also recognize that this process takes time and that choosing a strategy that fits the situation requires considering and selecting from a variety of approaches to find a good fit. The following are some examples of ways to apply authoritative, limit-setting practices in the home setting.

Rewarding good behavior. Rewarding good behavior and framing expectations in a positive manner can go far in inviting children to regulate their behavior in desirable ways (see entry “reward,” pp. 430–431 in the Topical Guide of the LDS scriptures). Periodically surprising a child with extra privileges or providing ways to “earn benefits” associated with desirable behavior can also encourage good performance (such as, providing a sincere compliment or taking a child out for ice cream to celebrate consistent piano practice). Positive interactions build strong relationships. For example, research

demonstrates that parents who maintain at least a 5- or 6-to-1 ratio of positive to negative interactions with their children and teens have more stable and adaptive relationships with them (Cavell & Strand, 2003).

Reasoning or induction. President Joseph F. Smith (1977) counseled, “Use no lash and no violence, but . . . approach them with reason, with persuasion and love unfeigned. . . . The man that will be angry at his boy, and try to correct him while he is in anger, is in the greatest fault. . . . You can only correct your children by love, in kindness, by love unfeigned, by persuasion, and reason” (pp. 316–317). Reasoning or induction in concert with enforcing limits is effective because it does more than simply correct behavior. It potentially teaches the child the reasons for socially acceptable behavior, communicates clear limits, acknowledges the emotions being felt, emphasizes consequences to others for hurtful behavior, and presents more acceptable strategies for dealing with conflict. Although not required for every situation, research shows that consistent efforts to provide simple rationales that are often repeated eventually sink in and can win voluntary obedience even in two- to three-year-old children. Numerous studies have documented positive ways that reasoning with children (especially in advance of a problem) can help them willingly regulate their own behavior, resulting in more confident, empathetic, helpful, and happy children (Hart, Newell, & Olsen, 2003).

Elder Ballard (2003) encouraged parents to “help children understand the reasons for rules, and always follow through with appropriate discipline when rules are broken. It is important as well to praise appropriate behavior. It will challenge all of your creativity and patience to maintain this balance, but the rewards will be great. Children who understand their boundaries through the consistent application of important rules are more likely to do well at school, to be more self-controlled, and to be more willing to abide by the laws of the land” (p. 7). He continues, “Helping children learn how to make decisions requires that parents give them a measure of autonomy, dependent on the age and maturity of the child and the situation at hand” (p. 8). Discussing reasons for rules can happen throughout the day as parents share expectations and suggest possible solutions. For example, in helping

young children learn to share, a parent might say: “I know you are eager to play with the toy first, but Lisa can only stay ten more minutes. Please share your toy with her and you can play with it after she goes home.” In helping an elementary school child deal with a child who frequently demeans him on the playground, a parent might say: “I understand how hard it is to have people say mean things about you. The situation won’t be solved by calling him names or by seeking revenge. Let’s talk about what we can do to resolve this situation in a way that is kind.”

Communicate effectively with teens. The teenage years can be a challenge for both parents and teens. With his characteristic positive outlook and clear counsel, President Thomas S. Monson (2012) has exhorted teenagers:

You entered that period some have labeled “the terrible teens.” I prefer “the terrific teens.” What a time of opportunity, a season of growth, a semester of development—marked by the acquisition of knowledge and the quest for truth.

No one has described the teenage years as being easy. They are often years of insecurity, of feeling as though you just don’t measure up, of trying to find your place with your peers, of trying to fit in. This is a time when you are becoming more independent—and perhaps desire more freedom than your parents are willing to give you right now. They are also prime years when Satan will tempt you and will do his utmost to entice you from the path which will lead you back to that heavenly home from which you came and back to your loved ones there and back to your Heavenly Father. (p. 126)

Our children are being tempted and buffeted like never before in the world’s history, and so parents who are patient and loving, strong and effective, and wise and inspired are needed more than ever.

Wise parents remember that a warm tone of voice, a loving touch, and the sincere feeling behind the words they use often communicate much more than the words themselves. For example, in reasoning with teens, if

not carefully worded, induction can come across as preachments and may provoke some opposition and testiness with older children and teens. Playing a “consultant role” often works better than attempting to lecture to teens (Cline & Fay, 1990; Cline & Fay, 1992). This involves reflective listening (for example, saying something like, “So you feel your teacher doesn’t explain math very well and you are suffering for it”), using less directive “I” rather than more intrusive “you” statements (“Since you are excited about a career in medicine, I am confused about your decision to drop advanced biology”), musing and wondering aloud about potential consequences and alternatives (“Think how our home would look if none of us did our part to keep it clean”), and leaving more ownership for problem solving to the teen as a way of validating the teen’s ability to work out a solution (“As long as it’s done this week, I’ll leave it up to you to decide when you’ll mow the lawn”).

Use subtle approaches when viable. Limit-setting strategies can also include subtle approaches that maintain a positive tone and do not require imposing penalties. For example, young children sometimes respond better to simply being redirected to more acceptable behaviors (such as, being shown how to gently pet a cat rather than being punished for inadvertently mishandling it). Planning ahead can also eliminate problems before they occur (putting safety latches on cupboards for curious toddlers, modeling sensitivity to an elderly grandparent’s physical limitations). A technique called *predisposing* consists of sharing standards in advance of a situation that could potentially be a problem by forestalling it before it can occur (“Since dinner will be ready soon after we return home, I’m not planning to buy you candy during our visit to the store right now; perhaps next time”).

Be clear and firm about rules and expectations. In authoritative homes, parents are clear and firm about rules and expectations. They take corrective action when children or teens do not respond. Children quickly learn whether their parents are likely to follow through and adjust their reactions accordingly. Firm and friendly reminders are better than the coercive methods that simply administer harsh, domineering, or arbitrary punishments. Authoritative parents patiently and proactively explain

reasons for setting rules and then administer needed corrective measures promptly when children do not abide by them (Baumrind, 2012). Research has shown that when firm habits of good behavior are established early in life through parental regulatory practices that include ingredients of limit-setting, judicious use of appropriate punishment, much positive reinforcement, and frequent reasoning, parents are better able to relax control as their children grow older (Baumrind, 1996).

Monitor behavior. Monitoring the behaviors of children and teens will allow vigilant parents to be aware of safety hazards, media choices, frayed emotions, and children's needs in order to catch and resolve small issues before they turn serious. During the adolescent years, monitoring the adolescents' whereabouts and behaviors has been demonstrated to be crucial in reducing delinquent activity (Laird, Pettit, Bates, & Dodge, 2003). In this age of cell phones and texting, parents can establish with their adolescents clear guidelines for checking in and reporting on activities, who they are with, when they will return, and ways to communicate a need for rescue in case of a compromising situation (Kerr, Stattin, & Ozdemir, 2012). A warm, nurturing parent-child relationship that is cultivated early in life can go far in establishing positive and open parent-child communication habits that can continue into the teen years.

Following through with consequences. Setting limits and calmly following through with pre-established consequences when rules are violated is one way that parents can help children learn to be self-regulating. Examples could include temporarily suspending teen driving privileges for traffic violations, withholding a privilege until chores or homework are completed, or enforcing a time-out when a child hurts others out of anger, then discussing alternative methods for dealing with the contentious situation. In particular, setting limits around potentially harmful influences (for example, inappropriate media, early dating, or late nights out) helps children feel more safe and secure. Authoritative parents take responsibility for setting an appropriate number of rules for regulating children's behavior that can be realistically remembered and enforced. Some children may require more rules or

more varied types of rules and punishments than others, depending on their individual natures. A strong family culture built around gospel principles helps children and teens recognize that standards such as those found in the Church's pamphlet, *For the Strength of Youth*, are not just good ideas, but represent the teachings of the prophets and the counsel of the Lord to youth in navigating the dangerous waters of today's culture.

In summary, many authoritative approaches to limit setting are possible. The foregoing suggestions are not intended to be an exhaustive list but are simply meant to illustrate appropriate responses consistent with maintaining the presence of the Spirit during disciplinary encounters. As parents show sensitivity to the situation and needs of the child, wisdom and inspiration can prevail. President Faust (1990) stated: "I do not know who is wise enough to say what discipline is too harsh or what is too lenient except the parents of the children themselves, who love them most. It is a matter of prayerful discernment for the parents. Certainly the overarching and undergirding principle is that the discipline of children must be motivated more by love than by punishment" (p. 32).

Love

As parents strive to help children and youth stay close to the Church, become morally grounded, adopt socially acceptable behaviors, and develop into young men and women who are fully prepared to accept adult roles, nothing will be more powerful in this process than the quality of the parent-child relationship. Nothing is more powerful in parenting than love. President Hinckley (1997) stated, "Every child is entitled to grow up in a home where there is warm and secure companionship, where there is love in the family relationship, where appreciation one for another is taught and exemplified, and where God is acknowledged and His peace and blessings invoked before the family altar" (416).

Children are less likely to push limits and seek attention through misbehavior when they feel that they are a high priority in their parents' lives.



Children are less likely to push limits and seek attention through misbehavior when they feel that they are a high priority in their parents' lives. © Nagy-Bagoly Ilona.

President Joseph F. Smith (1977) counseled, “If you wish your children to be taught in the principles of the gospel, if you wish them to love the truth and understand it, if you wish them to be obedient to and united with you, love them! And prove to them that you do love them by your every word or act to them” (p. 316). Certainly, as parents reason with their children and guide them to more appropriate behavior, it is important to remember that ultimately love and the parents’ relationship to their children will be the best vehicle for helping children learn to love, live, and appreciate the simple truths of the gospel embodied in the family proclamation, such as love, respect, repentance, forgiveness, and compassion.

Following Our Heavenly Father’s Example

Our Father in Heaven has given us a perfect example of how we should parent through the ways that he parents us. He gives us commandments, outlining the limits and boundaries within which we should conduct our



Parents should take time to be real friends with their children. © Konrad Bak.

lives. When we fail to meet his expectations, we face consequences and punishments according to his eternal laws that are consistent with our transgressions, and his rebukes are accompanied and motivated by his unfailing love. He will not withdraw his perfect and constant love from us, although we may withdraw from him at times (Eyring, 2012). He is always there for us when we earnestly seek him in humility and righteousness (see D&C 88:63, 83). He loves us perfectly. Elder D. Todd Christofferson (2011) stated, “If we sincerely desire and strive to measure up to the high expectations of our Heavenly Father, He will ensure that we receive all the help we need, whether it be comforting, strengthening, or chastening” (p. 99).

Parents become more like him as they learn to love unconditionally as he does and as they invest time in building relationships. President Ezra Taft Benson (1974) counseled: “Be a real friend. Mothers, take time to be a real friend to your children. Listen to your children, really listen, talk with them, laugh and joke with them, sing with them, play with them, cry with them, hug them, honestly praise them. Yes, regularly spend unrushed one-on-one time with each child. Be a real friend to your children” (p. 32). Wise

parents love not as their children become more lovable, since some days are certainly challenging. Rather, parents seek the gift of charity to experience a divine expanding of their capability to love through the good times and the bad—and thus are increasingly filled with his love (see Moroni 7:48). As parents unfailingly love each other and each child with fullness of heart, relationships can change, miracles of forgiveness and understanding can take place, and family solidarity and closeness can result.

Realizing the Benefits of Emotional Connection

Over the course of many decades, research has confirmed the significance of a strong parent-child bond and has demonstrated remarkably positive results in child outcome. For example, children are less aggressive and more sociable and empathetic if they have parents (particularly fathers) who are more loving, patient, playful, responsive, and sympathetic to children's feelings and needs. Similarly, mothers who take the time to engage in mutually enjoyable activities with their children more effectively convey values and rules to them (Kochanska, 1997). Within the encircling arms of a warm, strong relationship, limits are much easier to explain and enforce, and latitude is given with greater trust.

In a study of Latter-day Saint families, research demonstrated that parents who take the time to become emotionally connected with their teens, to set regulatory limits, and to foster autonomy are far more likely to have adolescents who are more careful in their selection of peers, regardless of what part of the country they live in. Children reared in these types of family environments—where prayer, scripture study, and religious values are stressed—were also more likely to internalize religiosity. Personal prayer and scripture study as well as private spiritual experiences were found to be a strong deterrent to delinquent behavior (Top & Chadwick, 1998).

Though they love their children and may have good relationships with them, parents may still wonder how they might maintain a strong and righteous influence on their children in a world where there are many other



Mothers who take the time to engage in mutually enjoyable activities with their children more effectively convey values and rules to them. John Luke, © 2010 Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

influences seeking for their time, attention, and loyalty. Within the context of a warm, loving relationship, research suggests that it is in the moral and spiritual domains where parents can have the most influence (Leman, 2005), even though schools, culture, the media and peer interaction can play major roles as well (Comunian & Gielen, 2006; Gibbs, Basinger, Grime, & Snarey, 2007; Speicher, 1994). For example, studies have shown that while peers have influence, they seem to matter more in superficial aspects of behavior like hair and clothing styles, the use of slang, and transient day-to-day behaviors, all of which can shift frequently with changes in friendships. Parents are more likely to have influence on core values that are reflected in religiosity, political persuasion, and educational plans, to name a few (Collins, Maccoby, Steinberg, Hetherington, & Bornstein, 2000; Sebold, 1986).

This recognition can help parents stay encouraged in their continuing efforts to love, train, encourage and pass virtuous values to their family through planned and spontaneous teaching of gospel principles in the



Quality time does not replace quantity time. Quality is a direct function of quantity—and mothers, to nurture their children properly, must provide both. © Igor Yaruta.

home, while demonstrating a high level of love and support. In speaking to mothers, though this principle can also apply to fathers, Elder Ballard (2006) stated: “Mothers must not fall into the trap of believing that ‘quality’ time can replace ‘quantity’ time. Quality is a direct function of quantity—and mothers, to nurture their children properly, must provide both. To do so requires constant vigilance and a constant juggling of competing demands. It is hard work, no doubt about it” (p. 31).

Showing Love and Support

Demonstrating love and support to children and teens includes maintaining a consistent presence in the child’s life and a strong commitment to their well-being. In addition, authoritative parents are generous in their verbal expressions of love and their willingness to provide the support needed for children and youth to thrive (such as attending the teen’s extra-curricular events or meeting with a child’s teachers at a parent-teacher conference). The following suggestions provide practical applications and counsel for building a loving parent-child relationship.

Be companionable and invest time. President Gordon B. Hinckley (1997) stated, “Fathers, be kind to your children. Be companionable with them” (p. 52). President Dieter F. Uchtdorf (2010) added, “In family relationships *love* is really spelled *t-i-m-e*, time. Taking time for each other is the key for harmony at home” (p. 22). Whether taking time to play ball with a young son in the park or being available and sympathetic in reassuring a teen struggling with homework, the consistent, loving presence of an interested parent makes a difference.

Safeguard relationships. Sister Marjorie Hinckley was an excellent example of the importance of safeguarding relationships with children. Speaking of her mother-in-law, Kathleen H. Hinckley writes, “When I called her for advice, she verbalized something I would say over and over to myself for many years to come, ‘Just save the relationship.’ I believe those words are the most simple and powerful parenting principle I have ever learned” (cited in Pearce, 1999, p. 56). All this takes significant time and energy.

Don’t be afraid to apologize. Even the most wonderful, responsive parents will, from time to time and under difficult circumstances, lose patience with demanding children. Just as there are no perfect children, there also are no perfect parents. Parents who admit mistakes and say they are sorry model sincere efforts to change and overcome human weaknesses. At one moment, parents may be more permissive because of various external and internal factors, at another moment more coercive. However, authoritative parents recognize their errors and make adjustments along the way. President Dieter F. Uchtdorf (2011) stated: “God wants to help us to eventually turn all of our weaknesses into strengths, but He knows that this is a long-term goal. . . . Many of you are endlessly compassionate and patient with the weaknesses of others. Please remember also to be compassionate and patient with yourself” (p. 120).

Reassure after reproof. After imposing a reasonable consequence for an action, such as being removed from an activity or experiencing the natural consequence of a poor choice, children may need added reassurance. Physical affection may assist a young child with a quivering lip to restore

a sense of inner security. A carefully chosen affirming statement at a time of reproof is generally important at all ages to keep relationships strong. At times, humor about the situation can be also be appropriately used to break the tension (“Okay, enough of this serious stuff, time for a group hug!”). Perhaps a change of activity may help, particularly when it gives children a chance to resume positively interacting with their parent. Finally, expressing confidence in the child can help alleviate their concerns (“I know it’s been a hard day. We all make mistakes. Let’s start over and try again”).

Focus more on effort than outcome. President Hinckley (1997) reminded parents: “Never forget that these little ones are the sons and daughters of God and that yours is a custodial relationship to them. . . . They may do, in the years that come, some things you would not want them to do, but be patient, be patient. You have not failed as long as you have tried. Never forget that” (p. 422). No matter the outcome of our sincere efforts, the Lord blesses us for our efforts. He is aware of our offerings of time and energy in behalf of our families. However, sometimes, despite the best efforts of parents, children exercise their agency in irresponsible ways and wander onto forbidden paths. Parents would do well not to berate themselves for what they think could have been. Just as surely as parents should not take all the blame for unrighteous and rebellious offspring, parents cannot take all the credit for faithful offspring. Maintaining an eye towards our Savior can help us recognize through all the uncertainties and disappointments of life that the Redeemer of the world can help repair our world when everything seems to fray apart. His Atonement heals all wounds and can comfort every heart pierced through with sorrow. The sweet reassurance of the gospel and the enabling power of the Atonement enlarge our hearts with love, understanding, patience, and hope—for ourselves and our loved ones.

Conclusion

Sister Cheryl A. Esplin (2012) stated, “Raising our children is a much greater responsibility than we can do alone, without the Lord’s help. He knows

exactly what our children need to know, what they need to do, and what they need to be to come back into His presence” (p. 10). We have ready access to the surest source of knowledge about parenting. As we learn through study, experience, and revelation, we can strengthen our capacities to apply these principles, live according to the truths of the proclamation, and approach the opportunities and challenges of parenting with greater confidence.

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