

Parents As Role Models

If you're a parent, you're a role model:

How to teach your children by example

Some days you do a great job as a parent. Other days you would rather not think about. But every day you act as a model—for your children.

It can be a scary thought, but from the time they are babies, your children are watching you and learning from you. They learn from your actions and your conversations. They absorb your attitudes and copy your expressions. Before they even reach school age they've probably learned far more than you ever intended.

Is this something to worry about?

That depends. Your young child will eventually grow up and have to make grown-up choices. If you show restraint when it comes to alcohol, other drugs, and gambling, then chances are your child will follow your example. If you control your temper and treat others with consideration, your child will copy your behaviour.

Can other people serve as role models?

Absolutely! If your child has a grandparent, aunt, uncle, or friend to spend time with, that person also becomes a role model. A teacher, coach, or

neighbour may become a role model. The more positive examples your child has to learn from, the better.

Just one caring adult can make a huge difference. Even when a child's life is difficult and filled with conflict, having one person who cares can give that child a lot of strength. Children are able to overcome very hard experiences in life, as long as they have someone who will stand by them, no matter what.

Anyone can be a role model, but parents or main caregivers are still the major influences in a child's life. Even when your child is a teen and seems to show no interest in being "just like you," she's still watching and copying—still using you as a role model.

How can I be a good role model?

One way is to think about how your behaviour affects your child. You can't always be calm and cheerful—nobody is. Besides, children need to see that their parents can express real feelings in a healthy way. If they see you handling anger appropriately they'll learn from you. If they watch



you celebrating special occasions without drugs, they'll learn something. If they see you facing difficult times without trying to escape through alcohol, other drugs or gambling, they'll remember. As they grow up, they'll learn by your example. And they'll have that example to follow in years to come, when they are coping with life's challenges.

What if I make mistakes that I don't want my child to copy?

If there are problems in the family, even very young children can be affected. Typically, children believe that they somehow caused the problems, and that family conflicts flare up because of something they did that was wrong.

You can help by talking to your child. Even a very young child understands a sincere apology. It's possible for you to be honest with your child and still not burden him with adult problems. For example, you can apologize and explain that sometimes you make a mistake (by drinking too much, or losing your

temper) but that you are trying hard to change. The important thing is to emphasize that you love your child and that adult problems are not the child's fault.

How can I make my child think of other positive role models?

Talk to your child about your own experiences when you were her age. Tell your child about someone who made a big difference in your life, and why you admired that person. This may be someone who is still alive and is also a part of your child's life, or it could be someone your child will never meet.

Share stories about family members or friends who showed real courage, kindness, humour, or determination in their lives. Talk about the people you still think of as role models now that you're an adult. Who do you admire, and why? This will help your child realize that different people behave differently. He may begin to consider which people he would like to try to copy as he grows up. These people can be his role models.

It's not easy being a model for another human being. But since modelling is a big part of every parent and caregiver's role, it's probably a good thing to keep in mind. Somebody's

watching you!

If you're concerned about how family problems with alcohol and other drugs, or gambling may be affecting your child, contact AADAC by calling toll-free 1-866-33AADAC or visit our Web site at www.aadac.com.

Resources

For a complete list of resources available, pick up the Drug/Alcohol Resource Directory at the Strathcona County Health Centre located at 2 Brower Drive or at Strathcona County Family and Community Services, 276, 2755 Broadmoor Boulevard (above Smitty's restaurant) in Sherwood Park.

Questions about drug or alcohol issues?

Call Strathcona County Family and Community Services at 780-464-4044.

Parent Leadership Workshop Series

Parents are leaders in their homes, their children's

schools and the community. We are looking for parents who are leaders, or potential leaders, who want to continue to build on their existing strengths. Parents with children of various school ages are invited to attend this group. Family and Community Services will be running a Parent Leadership Series.

- **Date:** 7 consecutive Tuesday from November 13 to December 18, 2007
- **Time:** 7 pm – 9 pm. Space is limited so please register as early as possible.
- For more information or to register, please call Family and Community Services at 780-464-4044.