

If You Don't Have A Village, Create One

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Too many dads and moms feel inadequate and alone with their most important jobs of giving birth and raising children. With a hoard of information, they often worry more about the right choice than enjoying their darlings' coos.

Becoming a parent changes people's lives forever and, regrettably, in our fast paced city we can become isolates from our previous circle of connections--workmates and colleagues. Often the connection at work was just that, work. Now we're talking babies, diapers and toddlers. But you ask, "Where are the grandparents?" They're often re-establishing new careers, taking university classes, traveling or living several provinces away.

Many cultures past and present surround families in care and guidance. In the Sudan and Kenya the midwife becomes like a second mother. When I was born my aunts and grandmothers took over the chores and remained entwined in my life until I left the farm. When any of the children needed a kind ear we rode our bikes to grandmother's house . . . and there were no big bad wolves along the way. Grandparents tend to offer unconditional love. According to Urie Bronfenbrenner, professor at Cornell University every child sometimes needs to feel loved "irrationally."

When my children came along, my mother came to support me for a week. When my own grandchildren were born, I was so far away only weeks after the babies were born did I managed a *care* trip.

Having a community that cares helps moms, dads and families feel powerful and competent. What's a new family to do? For that matter what is any family with all the modern pressures to do? Here are some suggestions:

- Take what parental leave is available to you.
- If you are nursing your baby get support from La Leche League.
- Take parent education courses and meet other families in similar circumstances to your's.
- If family is unavailable for regular support, *adopt an aunt, uncle or grandparent* from your neighbourhood or place of worship.
- Have potluck meals or fun outings with other families.
- Participate or start a babysitting co-op and/or play group.
- Organize play days in your neighbourhood.

- Keep your partnership strong.
- If you are a single parent, arrange for a Big Sister or Big Brother.
- Become a “team player” with your child minders, day care workers and teachers.
- Keep your career eye open for “child friendly” workplaces where the hours are flexible and/or day care is onsite.

Create a community that supports but does not stress your family. If carpooling or scheduling becomes challenging back off. We must be kind to both ourselves and our children to allow a modern version of “It Takes a Village to Raise a Child.”

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