

# Gentle Stepping



April 2017

Gentle Steps Foundation

Strengthening Families

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### Be My Neighbor, Please.

April brings with it promises of showers and rainbows. Even as I write this the clouds are heavy and dark and often seem to explode in burst of raindrops. The air is humid and even on the warm side. At Bradley today, students were dressed in shorts, flip flops, heavy sweaters and jackets. As we drove passed the schools we saw children jumping in puddles and parents protesting as they secretly smiled.

The dogwood trees outside of Gentle Steps Foundation are in full bloom and seem to be welcoming the daffodils and other early spring flowers. There seems to be more activity as people walk and smile at each other. I am reminded of Louis Armstrong as he sang "What a Wonderful World."

Spring is a time for renewal and what an excellent time for us to consider the lives of the children we meet each day. Mr. Fred Rogers sang:

It's a beautiful day in this neighborhood,  
A beautiful day for a neighbor,  
Would you be mine?  
Could you be mine? ...

I have always wanted to have a neighbor just like you,  
I've always wanted to live in a neighborhood with you.

So let's make the most of this beautiful day,  
Since we're together, we might as well say,  
Would you be mine?  
Could you be mine?  
Won't you be my neighbor?

Won't you please,  
Won't you please,  
Please won't you be my neighbor?

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### Communication: Being the Difference

As I sat in the waiting room at the doctor's office, a family sat across from me. Mom was texting on her iPad; Dad was seemingly busy on his iPhone. The oldest child (probably 12) was busy playing a game on his device while the youngest had a iPad on cartoons as he sat watching and munching on potato chips. No one talked to each other and each seemed very content waiting to be called by the nurse. Soon the nurse called the youngest child's name and the mom looked up and seemed a bit annoyed as she barked out for Charles to come on. Charles followed suit, attitude and all.

The truth here is that this happens more than we like to admit and often families are okay with not talking at all till a problem happens. Taking the time to just see how your child's day went at school or at play is one way to open the lines of communication. If a parent shows they value their child's feelings, beliefs, thoughts and ideas they can have a huge impact on their child's self-esteem and level of achievement in school and in other areas of interest.

Talking with your child is critical to their ability to perform well in many of the social skills needed to become responsible and healthy adults. Your words are ones of comfort, encouragement, direction and love. Self-expression is learned and it is important to note that we are not born able to express ourselves in a social way. In fact, infants demand that their needs be met. When they are hungry, they want food now. As children grow and we present them with an environment rich in language, overflowing with love, openness and honesty, our children learn that it is safe to express how they feel and what they think.



## Rules of Communicating with Your Child

### 1. Listen:

- Stop what you are doing
- Make eye contact
- Avoid jumping in or talking over your child
- Offer advice only if asked or if it a “must”
- Be empathetic
- Use words that show you are listening (such as):
  - Tell me more!
  - I know.
  - Wow!
  - That is just awful.
  - I am here.
  - Go ahead; let it out.

Listen...

Encourage...

Model...

### 2. Avoid power struggles

- Talk with your child not at them
- Give choices whenever possible
- Ask how they want to handle the situation
- Be an encouragement
  - I know you can handle it.
  - Every problem has a solution, even this.
  - Think it over; you will figure this out.
  - I am here to help you.
  - I went through this at your age, like when...

Children model the behavior of parents. How you express and handle yourself will usually determine how your children will as well. Speaking honestly and clearly, responding calmly, and listening carefully will occur only if children are provided with models and opportunities to practice. Children need to feel comfortable sharing their feelings, thoughts, and ideas.



## Books on Feelings:

I Am Happy: A Touch and Feel Book of Feelings

My Many Colored Days by Dr. Seuss

How Are You Peeling by Saxton Freymann and Joost Elffers

Feelings by Alik

The Feelings Book by Todd Parr

Baby Happy Baby Sad by Leslie Patricelli

Baby Faces by DK Publishing

When I Am by Gladys Rosa-Mendoza

**Private Sessions are available for \$35.00 a session with Julia Mitchell-Hoffman, Behaviorist and Pastoral Counselor**

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**Gently Planting  
One Seed of  
Kindness at a Time**

*Gently Stepping Forward  
Gentle St*



*and motivational  
programs that are  
organized around the  
following five protective  
factors: Parental  
Resilience; Social  
Connections; Knowledge  
Development; Concrete  
Support in*