

The Value of What Mothers Do
Fiona Audy
Jan/Feb 2008

I recently saw a book called "*What Mothers Do: especially when it looks like nothing*" by Naomi Stadlen. I haven't read it yet but I want to because I remember when my children were young wondering what it was that I was really doing and whether it had real value to the world. Now, as the parent of adult children of my own and foster parent to boys in their late teens, I can see more clearly that underlying the deceptively simple routine tasks of the first few years; changing diapers, feeding, playing and providing guidance, is the transmission of attitudes that build the foundation for personal self-worth and a sense of belonging and importance to the family and community. This is also when children learn to recognize and name their own feelings and learn how to deal with them. Expressing joy is acceptable in almost every family but learning to appropriately express anger, frustration and fear, and having people who will accept that the child feels those things at that moment, is probably even more important in preventing a life time of self-destructive behaviours.

Passing on these attitudes and skills to your children doesn't take any fancy equipment, special classes or the latest in baby gear. In fact sometimes those things can get in the way. It is possible to feed, cloth and provide the basic needs for a child in such a way that the messages they get about their value as a human being are negative ones, just as it is possible to do the same tasks in a way that shows them how valuable they are - not for what they do but just for *who they are*.

The positive messages happen at times such as the late night as you walk the floor with the teething baby for whom nothing is helping except your presence, the movement, the 99th verse of Old MacDonald Had a Farm and you trying to make up a sound for a wombat because you are sick of singing about cows. That baby is learning that his feelings matter and that you will be there for him even if you can't "fix" the problem. They happen when, for the hundredth time, you help the toddler who wants the toy someone else has to use words - not hitting - to get her point across. They happen when you are gazing into the eyes of your nursing baby or blowing raspberries on his tummy when you change a diaper. They are happening when it looks like you are doing nothing that will change the world and certainly nothing for which someone will give you a pay check.

When these things happen it can change the life of a child and that may change the world.

I want you to know that *what* you are doing does make a difference and *how* you do it makes all the difference in the world. There are no guarantees that bad things won't happen to your children, or that they won't make some poor choices as they get older. But the child with a solid sense of positive self-worth, and who knows that there are people who will support him or her, has a far better chance to getting through those situations and moving forward.

So go *enjoy* your baby! You are doing the most important, worthwhile and world-changing work of all!