

Parenthood (9): Playing Favorites

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It was natural for Jacob to love Joseph more than his other children; after all, Joseph was “*the son of his old age*” (Gn 37:3), and he was born of Rachel, Jacob’s true love (Gn 29:30; 30:22-24). But when Jacob expressed his preference for Joseph above the others, they became filled with murderous envy (Gn 37:4, 11, 20). Jacob’s favoritism caused years of grief both to himself and Joseph.

All of us find certain traits more appealing than others. As in the case with Leah and Rachel, some are more endowed with physical beauty than others. Some are more athletic while others show natural aptitude for music or painting. One might be more intellectually gifted than another. When these differing traits are present in our own children, the temptation for parents is to favor the child who possesses the characteristics most admired.

Children have an overwhelming need for parental love and acceptance. Unresolved emotional conflicts are often carried into adulthood by children who were never secure in regard to the love of one or both parents. This is especially tragic when a child feels rejection for reasons beyond his or her control. We parents must strive to love our children *unconditionally*, simply for the fact that they are *ours* and we are responsible for their welfare – including their emotional welfare.

It is important that parents strive for equality of feeling and treatment toward all their children. To favor a particular child or reject another for personal considerations is selfish and does both a disservice.

This does not mean that all children will be handled the same way in regard to their personal development. Because children *are* different, one type of discipline might work with one and not with another. One of the challenges of parenthood is to deal with each child as an individual and tailor the training of each to suit his or her particular make-up without showing partiality.

The most common mistakes that I have seen: 1) Lax discipline for the “baby” in the family, thus creating a spoiled monster; 2) Overcompensation toward the “black-sheep” of the family in an attempt to atone for perceived failures; 3) Excusing ill behavior in little boys by sexual stereotyping (“He’s just all boy!!!” No, he’s a brat and needs a spanking.).

Children are *very* perceptive and know a double standard when they see one. They also know when they are not the favorite. Let us strive for the maturity to treat our children fairly.