

The Online Parenting Newsletter vol.5 no.6 June, 2004:

FAMILY HARMONY

Last night I went to a chamber music concert and heard a wonderful string quartet play a beautiful work by Beethoven. Harmony at its very best.

The musicians looked at each other, not just the music in front of them. They looked to know when to start playing, when to come in after not playing for a few measures, when to slow down and speed up.

It occurred to me that in today's families we are often so busy we don't have time to look at each other. We talk to each other but are more often than not doing something else at the same time. This means we are facing the task we are doing instead of the person we are talking to.

Bad idea. Just as the musicians look at each other to get musical cues we should look at each other to get HUMAN CUES.

Let's take a lesson from musicians. To make beautiful family "music" we have to be attuned to each other's moods and feelings. We have to know when our words upset the other person or when what we say is pleasing to them. And we have to look at each other with love and affection.

All of us will occasionally dash out of the house and call back something like, "Don't forget to turn the oven on at 5:30. Be back at 6." But to promote family harmony make an effort to 1) Be in the same room with the person you are talking to. 2) Face the person. 3) Get the person's attention by starting out with their name.

Does this sound like simplistic, it-goes-without-saying-advice? Don't laugh. A counselor told me a couple she was seeing avoided a divorce by taking the above advice. They had been talking but not communicating.

Make a special effort to teach your children how important it is to look at the people they are talking to.