

STUDY ON NURTURING

Divide the class into groups of two or three. Ask the students to define the term NURTURE. Have the students share their definitions with the class.

Nurturing a child means to promote his/her development by providing nourishment, support, encouragement, and unconditional love throughout the life span.

Discuss how important nurturing is and how powerful love is and that without it, children do not grow or develop properly and can even die. To expand on the point, tell the students about the following study:

In the 1970s, Ohio University conducted a study on rabbits. Students were assigned to feed several groups of rabbits a high-cholesterol diet each day. Over time, all but one of the groups of rabbits began to display the hypothesized symptoms. One group showed a 60 percent intolerance to the diet for unexplained reasons. It was accidentally discovered that the student assigned to feed this "nonresponding" group of rabbits would hold, talk to, and pet each of the rabbits in his group each day before he fed them. This nurturing and loving care seemed to account for the rabbits' health and intolerance to the toxic diet. Repeat studies produced similar results.

As humans, we crave nurturing and love from other human beings. Infants like and want to be held. Children, especially when they are hurt, tired, or cold, like to be cuddled and rocked. Teenagers like to hear that they have done a good job and receive a pat on the back. Adults are no different; they need to have positive reinforcement, just like younger people. A great illustration of the human need to have love and nurturing can be seen in the elderly who are housed in nursing homes. Ask the students if they have ever been to a nursing home. What was their impression? Have they ever noticed how the elderly people want to hold your hand and look at you while you talk with them? They never want you to leave! Anyone that has visited a nursing home should be able to relate to this. All people have a need for human contact. It is not a sexual connotation. On the contrary, it is simply a need to feel loved, wanted, supported, and important as a human being.

Research has indicated that human beings need at least 10 positive touches a day; for example, when someone shakes your hand and at the same time pats your arm or wrist. Have a student volunteer to come to the front of the class. Give him/her a warm hand shake or pat on the back. Ask him/her how it made him/her feel. Discuss his/her answer as a class. Split the class into five groups. Assign each group one of the following age-groups: infants, children, teenagers, adults, elderly. Have them develop a list of ten positive touches for their assigned age group. Discuss their lists with the class.

In 1946, Rene Spitz studied the effects of a lack of nurturing by comparing two institutions: a prison and an orphanage. In the prison nursery, mothers cared for their own babies. In the orphanage, each nurse was assigned to care for seven babies (an extremely high ratio of caregiver to infants). Spitz found that the mortality rate of the babies cared for by the nurses in the orphanage was 37 percent higher even though the orphanage was noted for its excellent medical care. The reason the infants in the orphanage died, according to Spitz, was from a lack of love.

Harry Harlow did an experiment in which he isolated a group of monkeys from any human or animal contact for the first six months of life. He found that when he tried to socialize the isolated monkeys with other monkeys raised in nurturing circumstances, the isolated monkeys were unable to get along with the others and were extremely afraid. They would also scratch and pick at themselves due to their fear. He also conducted another study in which he took a group of monkeys from their mother immediately after birth and gave them dummy monkey mothers made of wire and cloth. The infant monkeys treated and responded to the dummy mothers as though they were real monkeys. However, these infant monkeys, which were deprived of the care, affection, and nurturing of a real mother, did not develop maternal instincts and had other signs of emotional stress.