



Caring for Children

by Billie Davis, Education Consultant

"He cares for you."
Child care.
Day care.

Take a moment to consider how you feel about the term *CARE* as we use it in different contexts. You will find *CARE* turning from an intimate, active verb: God cares for us (1 Peter 5:7), to a common noun: day care—a produce, up for consumer inspection.

CARE turns from an exquisite promise into a parent's problem. It turns from a cherished truth into the subject of political debate and controversial research.

"Quality care helps children's behavior." "Active, stimulating settings mean fewer problems for kids, a study of toddlers shows."

These are headings from a federally supported study report. Parents tend to interpret such words as proof that children benefit from good day care. The result, whether or not it is consciously intended, is to make working parents feel comfortable about leaving their children, and be positively influenced in regard to nationally promoted child care plans.

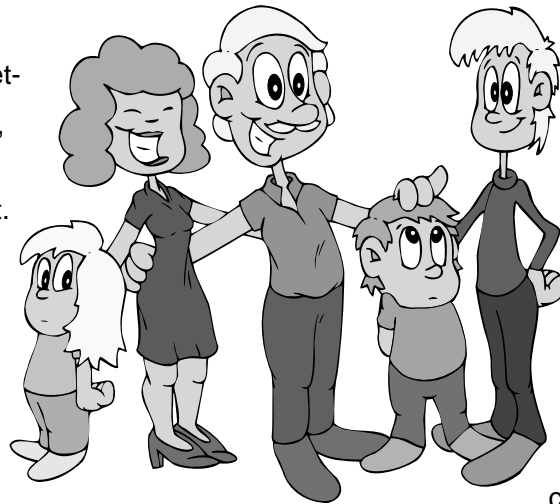
The study we quote here is one of the largest and longest-running ever conducted. It includes 1,300 families, involves researchers from 14 universities, and is designed to follow children from 1 month old through 7 years.

Among the findings are evidences that children cared for in stimulating settings with other

children demonstrate better social behavior than those who are left with a single hired caregiver. Children placed in high quality care that is nurturing and supportive have fewer problems, such as tantrums, and they are more cooperative.

Most media descriptions of such studies begin with promises of good news for working parents. Then they get to the *however*s, such as:

However, the researchers found that a mother's sensitivity still plays a larger role than child care



in children's social functioning."

"On the other hand, 2-year-olds who spent more time in child care had had more behavior problems than others the same age who spent less time in such care."

Parents seldom have opportunity or time to examine actual research findings. They rely on media coverage. Too often they

read only headings and the first sentences. Or they hear one or two sentences on the television news. Or they see dramatic documentaries. Helping them to understand the full meaning of media reports is a part of the Christian education ministry.

Parents need to understand caring as a personal relationship, not only a commodity, or situation they can purchase for their children. Trained teachers have knowledge that makes them better able to interpret research findings. They can share insights from biblical knowledge and teaching experience to guide parents in decision making.

The "quality" model is a Christian family.

Researchers describe "quality child care" as that which is:

1. Provided in stable and pleasant surroundings.
2. Delivered by sensitive and motivated caregivers.
3. Stimulating, nurturing, and supportive.
4. Conducive to social interaction, such as cooperation and compliance.

Children need stability, skilled care, and sensitive caregivers. They need to be attended by those who are motivated by sincere love and concern. They need opportunities to cooperate and to experience interdependence and responsibility. We can conclude from this that the best measure of a child care facility is how nearly

it approximates the qualities and characteristics of a healthy Christian family.

Biblical models of caring include devotion and sacrifice.

When you look for the word *care* in a modern study Bible, you find stories of caring acts. One example describes a woman's expression of devotion. It teaches us that caring is devotion to the point of sacrifice. Mary of Bethany poured a pint of expensive perfume on Jesus' feet (John

12:3). Caring is a deep feeling of respect and unbounded love. If you really care for a person, no gift is too lavish, no expression is too emphatic. How much do we care for our children?

The ultimate model for caring is Jesus' sacrifice. Jesus likens himself to a good shepherd who cares for the sheep to the point of laying down His life for them (John 10:11-14). Jesus contrasts himself with a hired person. This does not mean that a wage-earning shepherd never cares. It

means that the difference between a good shepherd and a hireling is the motivation—the degree to which he cares for the sheep in the sense of loving and protecting them. The question in the context of child care is whether the caretaker really cares, or just watches over children until parents come to get them.

For Christian parents, it is clear that "child care" requires caring for children. And Christian caring requires devotion and sacrifice.

Questions For Further Study—

1. In what ways do your children's ministry workers show CARE as opposed to simply teaching or baby-sitting?

2. What steps can you take to educate your children's ministry workers concerning the importance of the CARE children should receive?