

Family Wellbeing Affects All of Society

The welfare of the family is important to its members, but also to all of society. After all, the family unit is the foundation of society. Society's future and the raising of its new citizens are built and dependent upon the family.

Parents are in the key position of ensuring a child's welfare. Although families with children have a wide range of services available to them, these cannot replace parenting and home upbringing. The family's wellbeing has broad implications that extend far into the future. For this reason support for the family's wellbeing is an important societal issue, and that's why it also is under much discussion.

Child Welfare

The most significant protective factors for a child's welfare are found at home. Among the most important ones are parents who love their children and care about their upbringing. Also the environment for growth and development outside of the home has great significance for a child's wellbeing and growth. Parents don't always have enough resources to independently support a child's development. Then especially, support from outside the home is crucial. If some difficulty in the home, such as a parent's illness, marital problems, or fatigue threatens or endangers a child's development, it is important that assistance from outside the home and, if necessary, professional services would fill the void. Early childhood education programs and schools support the home's child-rearing efforts. In order to ensure this, open, trust-based interaction between home, early childhood educators and school is essential.

Congregation activities—church services, Day Circle, and home and family work also are supports for believing parents and homes. These cannot replace the rearing work of the home or the support offered by society, but they offer a protective social network and above all support faith life. The family's best support and security is in God and His care. That's why children and parents need the sermon of faith that encourages them to believe, hope, and love in the midst of everyday life.

The Relationship between Spouses

There are three essential focus areas in supporting family wellbeing: children (together and individually), parents and guardians, and parents as spouses. An old saying is that the children's home is shaped by the relationship between father and mother. Thus the spouses' relationship is essential to the family's welfare—it is reflected in the children. The love between spouses isn't only in feelings, but above all in will and deed. The Bible teaches, "For love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave" (Song of Solomon 8:6). But the Bible also teaches that love is longsuffering and kind. It does not envy or boast and is not puffed up, nor does it behave in an unseemly manner. It also isn't easily provoked and doesn't recount the wrong that one has possibly had to suffer at the hands of another (1 Cor. 13:3–5).

Marital love, according to the Bible also includes perseverance in the midst of difficulties. The foundation of this love is faith in God and trust in the one you love. Love is cared for through openness, honoring one another, and forgiveness. I have experienced myself that exactly these matters are often put to the test in marriage. The demands and pressures of work life are brought home and threaten to take the time and energy needed for one's spouse and children. I have also experienced how important it is for both spouses to be able to cope, that the family and children are approached as a mutual duty and shared gift. In the time of waiting for a new family member to be born, spouses especially need each other's support and encouragement.

God's Word and the gospel of forgiveness are the main source of strength in spouses' lives. Faith of the heart opens

the correct view of parenting, child rearing, and life choices. That's why the foundation of family welfare is formed on the parents' personal faith and their caring for faith life. This also gives a firm foundation for rearing children. Through faith, children are seen as God's gifts and parenting as a valuable and responsible duty, for which we can pray to God for strength. The gospel gives the power to believe and awakens us to see God's guidance in our own and in our family members' lives. The gospel cleanses us from sin and frees us from the burdens that tire us in our faith life.

Interaction based on respecting one another and understanding and accepting differences creates a foundation for an atmosphere at home where it is permissible also to fail and to be weak. The parents' relationship and ability to support each other play a key role in the home's atmosphere. Parents who love each other and are concerned over each other also have the energy to love and care for their children.

How Can We Support Families?

Among believers, married couples' camps and courses aim to support both marital relationships and parenting. Through presentations, discussions, and peer support at such occasions, beneficial instruction and encouragement are received for caring for marital relationships and parenting. The objectives of congregational family and diaconal work are to support parents and families both spiritually and emotionally as well as to give concrete help. The various forms of child and youth work also support the work of rearing children. The believers' folk colleges (*opistos*) in Finland do important youth work and at the same time support the rearing work in homes. Do we use these forms of support?

Family support cannot be left only to society's sources of official services and assistance, nor solely to the congregation's resources or activity. Important volunteer support givers are close ones, relatives, neighbors, and friends. That's why it is important for families with children to have friends and friend-families who can walk alongside them, especially when adversity, cares, and sorrows come. In addition to concrete everyday help, peer support and discussion partners also hold great significance when life experiences can be shared and solutions can be sought together. May God grant us the ability and skill asked for in the following song of Zion:

“Savior, give me Your compassion;
give a mind of tenderness
to approach a wav'ring trav'ler
humbly, and in friendliness,
that I speak in truth and wisdom
to a straying, stubborn pilgrim...
...May I speak in love to sever
bonds of bitterness and anger”
(SHZ 366:1,2).

In addition to spiritual support and support given by friends, parents need concrete help at home as well as professional help also in special situations. It is worthwhile to freely ask for and use such when needed. We can freely and actively work and promote family issues in our home areas, as this produces wellbeing for all of society.

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Discussion Questions:

1. Why is the relationship between spouses—mother and father—so important in family life? What can happen when this relationship is troubled and uncared for? How can a loving and forgiving relationship between the parents help their children? In what ways can husbands and wives support each other?
2. What helps are available to you, such as camp events, congregational discussions, home services, etc.? Share examples of times when such gatherings helped to encourage you in your role in family life.
3. Is it easy in our busy lives to find time to attend the gatherings and events of God's children? Is it challenging? Why? How can we encourage our families and others to take part in these?
4. When there's need, what forms of governmental, charitable, or professional help are available to us in our communities?