

## *“Family Values”*

The other day I noticed a bumper sticker that said, “Hate is **NOT** a Family Value.” I am not sure why that person had a truism for a bumper sticker, but it did stimulate me to think about the idea of “Family Values.”

“Family Values” is a term that has been tossed around a lot recently, and I am not sure what it means because there must be hundreds of different family values in our western culture alone. Certainly most of us would agree that families have value, but it seems the values that are reflected in many families are very different. Perhaps that is why people are talking about it more and would like some sort consensus about what constitutes “good” family values.

As a Pastoral Counselor and Marriage and Family Therapist, I have a few ideas about some values that seem to help families function more effectively. I have noticed that families work better if they value communication, which actually means they value **listening**. This also means they communicate not only what they **do** but also how they **feel**. Feelings are not equated with behaviors but are understood as simply being true. We use feelings to inform the decisions we make about our behaviors, and parents who model making good behavior decisions have less problem guiding their children to do the same.

Along with the value placed on communication in an effectively functioning family, there is also an important value placed on respect. This does not only mean that children just respect their parents. Instead, there is an atmosphere of respect that tries to maintain the idea that “I am important AND you are important” even when we are frustrated or angry at each other. This can very hard to do, but families who strive to keep this value seem to be happier and have fewer problems making and keeping the boundaries and rules that enable them to function on a day-to-day basis.

Another value that seems to be important in an effective family is the value that is placed on individuality. This one is tricky because families are usually one unit under one roof, but each person under the roof is different. Each person has different needs, feelings, talents and personality. Daily living and functioning combined with preserving individuality in a family is not easy. I suggest that we strive to place a high value on being interested in each other and maintain a posture of always wanting to learn something new. Feeling accepted and understood in spite of our differences is a huge motivator for cooperating and meeting the challenges of living under the same roof.

Religion, sociology, anthropology and even government have many more important values to consider that would never fit on a bumper sticker, and are vital for creating and maintaining happy families. These are just a few I see from the perspective of many years of counseling and learning from individuals, couples and families.