

## **A view from the back seat**

Don't worry that children never listen to you; worry that they are always watching you. Robert Fulghum

We tend to worry so much about what children see and experience when they are watching television or surfing the internet. But children have another view of the world. It's the things they see and hear everyday in and around their family. We can turn the television off or limit internet use, but we can easily forget that they are more impacted by what they observe and experience in their own families. Whatever your family form-single parent, stepfamily, nuclear family or grandparent raising your grandchildren, children are observing how you respond to them, how you live, what you do in a crisis and yes, how you love. It's the view from the back seat. Not what we hope to or want to present, but what our children see when we aren't looking. It is the age old adage, not what is said but what is done.

Take a moment and remember your own childhood. What was your view from the back seat? How did it shape you as a parent? Do you remember your parents holding hands or being affectionate? Did your mom sit close to your Dad in the front seat of the car? Did they talk or sing or laugh? Perhaps you also have some not so great memories. Many of you remember fights or arguments between your parents. Some memories are downright scary, like parents talking about divorce, or one parent leaving the house. It is not usual for us to think, "When I grow up, I want to be just like..." or "When I grow up I will never ..."

Children learn about life, love and relationships by watching their parents. They tend to see their parents as one unit, working together to take care of them. The challenge of parenting is to blend differing world views and values so that the needs of the parents and children are met. Sometimes bringing two worlds together causes conflict. Even then, the best interests of our children must be. Healthy parents don't ask their children to keep secrets, or choose favorites. The task of making life work belongs to us, not to our children.

So what do your children see when you are not looking? What are they learning about life and love? Here are a few ideas that might help.

Learn how to do conflict well. If at all possible, don't fight in front of your kids. Children should never see their parents hurt one another.

If you are a single parent, be prudent about dating. Don't introduce your children to every person you date.

"See, what you are doing right now is flipping through the channels. You are going from one image to another searching for what you remember about them."

"I hate reality television shows, but in a way it's exactly what we create everyday for our children. We act out these images we want them to see, but it's when you think they aren't looking...now that's reality!"

The love they see

Bob Perks

You can't pretend to love.

You can't even fake a smile.

The things you think they don't notice, they have been watching all the while.

Be aware that they are seeing  
everything you do.

If you want your children to know love

Then it's really all up to you.

For love isn't just at play time

love isn't a TV show

If you love them unconditionally

Then love will be what they know.

It's not what you want them to remember  
it's what they will choose to see.  
If you loved one another always  
Then loving is what they will be.

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#### KIDS' VIEW: FROM THE BACK

This one is just another illustration of how we learn so young -- by osmosis-- how to have a smart marriage, or a not-so-smart one. I always say we learn most of it by the time we're three or four at our parents' knees. Some of my favorite quotes on the quotes page speak to this one -- they ARE watching, learning, and trying to figure out, "how does this work?" - diane

The most important thing a father can do for his children is to love their mother. Theodore Hesburgh

I talk and talk and talk, and I haven't taught people in 50 years what my father taught by example in one week. Mario Cuomo

Then there was the guy who loved his wife so much, he almost told her. Unknown

You win or the relationship wins. Terry Hargrave

People are often enamored with my Super Bowl ring. But it's my wedding ring that I'm most proud of. And having a good marriage takes even more work than winning a Super Bowl. Trent Dilfer, Seattle Seahawks quarterback

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Let the wife make her husband glad to come home and let him make her sorry to see him leave. Martin Luther

How did I decide to get involved with Smart Marriages? We started asking young couples at our clinic, "Who's marriage would you like yours to be like?" They'd answer, "We don't know any." Jennifer Baker

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> I saw Mommy kissing Santa Claus

> underneath the Mistletoe last night....

> Marriage Quotes:

<http://www.smartmarriages.com/marriage.quotes.html>