



CREATIVE PARENTING

I Miss You!

BY SUSAN E. MURRAY

One of the most important things we do in life is to build, maintain, and enjoy our relationships with others. At times, these relationships become stressed because a parent, grandparent, or friend must be away for a time or move away indefinitely or forever. Whatever the reason, separation is difficult. To help children understand separation, we can start by explaining that there are two types of separation—long- and short-term.

What may seem like a logical, rather short separation to an adult, can seem like a very long time to a child. A friend shared with me that she told her grandchildren she would be gone for a short time. Her nine-year-old grandson, Charlie, said he thought she was going to be gone for a very long time, because she would miss two important events at his school.

Taking separations seriously is important, because these separations profoundly affect our children. Adults need to reassure children that they are lovable and that the adults in their lives will always love them, whether they are close or far away. It is important to remember that time has a different meaning for children than it does for adults. Relationships with children need constant nurturing. If you are separated from important children in your life, I encourage you to plan some specific activities to show those children that you value the importance of staying connected.

In this world of fast-paced communication, I would encourage you to remember that children need tangible remembrances of the important adults in their lives. While that can be accomplished to some

degree by e-mail messages, it is also helpful to talk on the telephone and to plan activities that will keep you in touch. It is easy to rely on other adults in the child's life to keep us posted as to their activities and advances, but that does not necessarily help the child feel connected to you.

In her book *While We're Apart...*, Carol Gesme suggests many activities which adults can initiate to keep in touch with the important children in their lives. Some activities, in turn, can be completed by children.

- ▶ Create a calendar for one week. For each day of that week, write down the things that happened to you every day, both big and small. Include what you ate for breakfast, things you saw, feelings, thoughts, or memories you had. You might end each day with a statement: "The best thing I did today was ...," or "A way God blessed me today was ..."
- ▶ For older children, send a gift certificate to your favorite restaurant. Choose a certain day and time for each of you to go to the restaurant nearest you at the same time. Afterwards, call on the phone and talk about your experience, share what each of you ate, etc.
- ▶ Send a copy of a favorite tape or CD. Have them send you theirs. Let each other know what you enjoyed about the music.
- ▶ For a younger child, trace a picture of your hand with a colored pen or marker. Send it to that important child with instructions for them to trace their hand holding yours, with a different colored pen or marker. Share with them that they can look at it often and remember that you are thinking of them and miss them.

Our children will be better able to trust human relationships, and transfer that trust to their relationship with an unseen Father in Heaven, if the important adults in their lives give them tangible, consistent nurturing when they are separated for short or long periods of time.

Consider ordering Carole's book which contains over 100 fun and meaningful ways for loved ones to stay in touch and even strengthen existing relationships during a prolonged separation. You can reach her at (952) 938-9163 or e-mail cgesme@cs.com.

For grandparents living a distance from their grandchildren, there's a helpful web site devoted to helping grandparents and grandchildren keep connected: www.igrandparents.com

