



**CENTRE COUNTY PREVENTION COALITION**  
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**June 30, 2010 – Messages to our children**

Helen Hanson is a retired James Madison University faculty member and grandparent now doing story times in the Bennett Family Center. This weekly column, published on Wednesdays, is a collaboration of Centre County *Communities That Care* serving Bald Eagle, Bellefonte, Penns Valley, and Philipsburg-Osceola Area School Districts, and Care Partnership: Centre Region *Communities That Care* serving the State College Area School District.

A popular novel that a lot of parents, grandparents, and others who care about children are reading the summer is "The Help" by Kathryn Stockett. It is set in Jackson, Mississippi, in the 1960s when some white families had black housekeepers who also doubled as nannies.

In one of these homes, a young toddler relied heavily on her nanny for love and positive reinforcement because her own mother had little time or love for her. When the nanny is fired near the end of the book, she says goodbye to her small charge and tries to leave her with a message that she can hang on to during the rest of her life, as described in this excerpt.

I let her cry a minute on my chest and I take her face into my hands again. I take a deep breath and I tell her to do the same.

"Baby Girl," I say, "I need you to remember everything I told you. Do you remember what I told you...about what you are?"

And then she say it, just like I need her to. "You is kind," she say. "You is smart. You is important. "

These are the words the little girl has learned from her nanny to describe her 4-year-old self.

While the book is only a novel, and the people are not real people, nevertheless it delivers a powerful message. The nanny, even without education, realizes how important it is to program her young charge to believe in herself and to help fortify the child for all the knocks life would give her.

How many times have you heard a parent let a child know how clumsy he is--programming him to a life of tripping over himself and feeling unsure of himself in different situations because that's what he learned as a youngster.

Or hearing a grandparent explain to an acquaintance how shy her granddaughter is, instead of programming her to feel confident in meeting someone new. So many negative messages are given to small children.

It is just as easy to say something positive to a child. You are so loving. You are so kind. You share so nicely with other children. I love you so much and am proud of you. How much better it is to be positive rather than calling attention to something negative about a child's behavior.

What parents, grandparents, and everyone who cares about children really want is a self-assured little person who is not fearful but is willing to try things, to get along with others, who might even grow up to be a leader. We want to raise children who are independent and believe in themselves.

The children in your life are listening to you. What message are you delivering? Try more often to be positive.

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