

## 6 Imprinting Values 8-24-06

Yesterday was a stressful day. I couldn't wait to climb into bed last night, snuggle into my well-worn, comfy pillow, and open the book which is my current read. I would guess that when I got completely settled, my serotonin went up just as my blood pressure went down. I felt completely at peace.

For all of us, there are experiences which bring us comforting associations. When we face demands, we recreate those experiences which will de-stress us.

Many of these comforting behaviors were learned when we were very young. We turn to "comfort food" which was served at our family table when we were children. Routines such as reading at bedtime may take us back to our childhood when life seemed simpler and easier to understand.

Marketing firms are well aware of this phenomenon. I recently read an article about their use of "brand imprinting for later actuation in life."

Marketers aim to make positive associations for their products in early childhood in order to guarantee adult customers. Their goal is to plant seeds in children so that their products will remind adults of carefree times, the warmth of being with mom and dad, the pleasure of play, and happy summer afternoons.

McDonalds has done this as well as anyone. Their "Happy Meals" were the first fast food children's meals. They build colorful "Play Places" at their restaurants so that children will spot them as their families drive past.

No wonder a "Quarterpounder with Cheese" has become one of America's comfort foods. When we are on a tight schedule during a stressful day, a quick trip through the "drive-thru" is high temptation, indeed.

This "brand imprinting" can wield opportunities both positive and negative. Knowing the power of the lifelong associations our children will make with their childhood happiness gives parents a great opportunity.

We might ask ourselves: What values would I most like to imprint on my children?

If you hope to raise a child who will love learning his whole lifetime, you can use this phenomenon for that, too. Make a family event out of going to the library. Establish a special place in your house to keep books, and sit close and snuggle as you devour them. Laugh and cry over the stories you share.

Some adults will forever associate reading with the struggle to decode unfamiliar marks on a page when they went to school. They will remember embarrassment as they stammered to read aloud in oral reading.

But surrounding reading with warmth and joy in your home will give your child a different set of associations. And maybe when she grows up and has a stressful day, she will find comfort in reaching for a book.