

By Katharine Bird
NC News Service

Two years ago James Kenny, now 51, ran his first 26-mile marathon. His coach and partner for the marathon was Joe, his oldest son. The elder Kenny, a clinical psychologist, is in private practice in Rensselaer, Ind.

"I could never have run the marathon without Joe," Kenny said, adding he would have quit the grueling race at the 21-mile mark.

Long before the marathon, his son, an experienced runner and a medical student, set up a training program for his father to follow. "I was never an athlete, but Joe kept saying, 'You can do it if you want to,'" Kenny said.

Twice weekly his son called him from Indianapolis "to make sure I was doing all right," Kenny added.

The psychologist told that story as an example of how children can help parents develop an unexplored talent.

Parents spend so much time encouraging children to develop different talents that it's neat to turn the tables sometimes. It's a kind of "quiet reciprocity," Kenny commented.

Rock music is another area where youths can teach parents. Parents can learn a lot if they are willing to go beyond the "salacious words to see where the rock star is coming from," Kenny suggested.

When children see parents respect their expertise in some area, it helps them develop self-confidence, Kenny said. Children pick up a message that says if "my parents listen to me I must be OK."

He and his wife Mary are the parents of 12 children and the authors of "Family Talk," a column syndicated weekly by National Catholic News Service.

Kenny is convinced that parents lay the "basic foundations, the basement and first-floor stuff" in preparing children to face life courageously. Parents "encourage pre-talent skills," he said.

A goal of parenting is to encourage children to see themselves in positive terms "as good and beautiful persons," Kenny said. Then children will be able to tackle the future with the feeling they "can do anything." The family is in a unique position to do this since "it's there 24 hours a day, seven days a week," the counselor added.

Kenny also talked about what he considers some hazards parents need to keep in mind.

All children have special abilities, but often children in the

Who's teaching whom?



same family have quite different talents, he observed. One child might show talent in several sports while another might not, demonstrating talent instead in another area.

The hazard is that children may think they have to excel exactly as a sibling does "to please parents," Kenny continued. Parents can head this off by showing children that each is equally valuable in their eyes.

If a child has a special gift "to make instant friends with anyone," Kenny said, the parents can get across to the child that this is a handy personal trait to have.

Kenny cautioned parents to keep an eye on what's happening when children participate in competitive events. Too much of the

world has the overly competitive attitude that it's "dog eat dog and my advancement is at your expense," he observed.

Kenny, for example, likes to see children take part in several sports "just for fun." Sports should help youths "develop the gifts God gave them, to be full, well-rounded persons."

Kenny stressed how valuable it is for children to have their parents' support at performances or competitions. Seeing parents up front at games, band drills or plays encourages youths to do their best and to keep improving, the family life expert said.

(Ms. Bird is associate editor of Faith Today.)

The family on

By Dolores Leckey
NC News Service

A family I knew when I was a young woman provided clues to the way I hoped our own family might grow. I've written elsewhere about them — about a man and woman who built a house in the woods of Minnesota:

"They gave life to their children there, and taught them many things: psalms and poems and stories of great men and women. They taught their children respect for the intellectual life, for the spiritual life and for the life of manual labor. The man is dead now, and his grown children abide all over the earth. They are lawyers and writers, carpenters and artists, politicians, business persons and parents. They are caring citizens in a variety of communities." ("Sacred Shelters," by Dolores Leckey, in "Living With Apocalypse," edited by Tilden Edwards; Harper and Row)

What did I see in that family? First, an atmosphere. It valued creativity and the exploration of different kinds of work: the work of the home and the world's work.

Sons joined their mother in bread baking and the mother encouraged her artist son to find a corner of the house to serve as his studio. Politics, literature, music — all were present.

Rumors about

By Father John Castelot
NC News Service

As a miniature model of the church, the Christian family proclaims to contemporary society in every age: "This is what the church is like. This is how people, transformed by Christ's love, can live together in peace and harmony."

Given the needs of human society in various ages and cultures, this proclamation is given different emphases in different circumstances. Keeping this in mind helps us to understand and appreciate some otherwise puzzling passages in certain New Testament letters.

For example, the author of Titus says: "The older women...by their good example must teach the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be sensible, chaste, busy at home, kindly, submissive to their husbands. Thus the word of God will not fall into disrepute" (2:3-5).

Most of this advice would meet with ready acceptance today. But references to being busy at home

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