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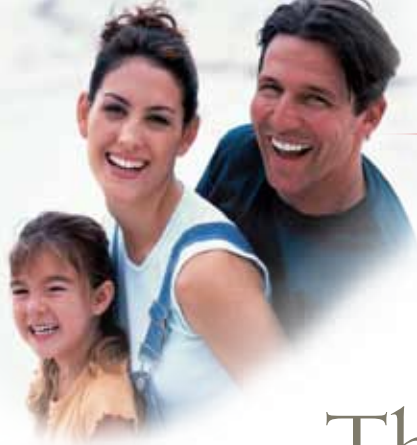
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## The Neighborhood Kids

OBSTACLES OR OPPORTUNITIES?

BY SUSAN E. MURRAY

Ellen White loved children. Her granddaughter recalls that when she and the neighborhood children played in the yard, her grandma joined in the fun. Ellen's home was a place where children were welcome, a place where they delighted to be.<sup>1</sup>

I invite you to make a positive difference for the children in your little corner of the world, whether you have children in your home or not.

Valerie Bell, in *Nobody's Children*,<sup>2</sup> suggests we develop a positive spiritual attitude toward the children in our neighborhoods. She challenges readers to pray for the Lord to make Himself real in each child's life. "In this day of decreasing church attendance, you may be the only access some child has to God" she says.

Believe in the difference one life can make: Learn the names of the children, referring to them by their names often. Make an effort to give a smile when you see them, look for the positive. Convey to each child that they are important, that you like them. Pray specifically for each child, asking God to help you know how to best support that child.

Think of some conversation starters. Almost anything will do: "Where did you get those neat shoes?"; "What is your favorite sport?"; or "What did you do last weekend?" Remember, a question that elicits a "yes" or a "no" answer will not begin much of a conversation.

Tell children special things you observe about them as they play, for example: "I noticed you picked up lots of the puzzle pieces. Thank you!" When appropriate, offer children a drink of water or fruit juice and sit down with them for a few minutes while they cool off or warm up, depending on the weather.

Share or start a tradition with the neighborhood children — it may be baking cookies, making snow cones, setting the sprinkler for a certain time of day, playing ball with them,

building snowmen at the first snow, letting them help wash the family car, etc.

Let the children know your house and yard rules. Be clear and direct about when they can come into the house and yard. Have your own children decide ahead of time which toys they are willing to share and what personal property they do not wish to have others play with. Honor their choices and intervene when necessary. Treat your own children and those from the neighborhood in the same courteous, respectful way as you would an adult visitor.

Think of your home and yard as a place where happy childhood memories are made. Remember that your home can stand as a beacon to a child who is yearning for some love and security. And for those children who do come from secure homes, sometimes too much of a good thing is wonderful — like happy childhood memories. I believe our caring attitudes and actions toward the children in our neighborhoods can be a power for God and for His truth. Ellen White supports this by sharing, "Our sphere of influence may seem narrow, our ability small, our opportunities few, our acquirements limited; yet wonderful possibilities are ours through a faithful use of the opportunities of our own homes" *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 355.

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Susan Murray is a professor emerita of behavioral sciences at Andrews University, and she is a certified family life educator and licensed marriage and family therapist.

1. Burns, Gary. "A Special Gift". *Lake Union Herald*, March (2007), <http://lakeunionherald.org>.

2. Bell, Valerie. *Nobody's Children: Reaching Out to the Lonely Kids in Your World*. Nashville: W Publishing Group (1989).