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First-Time Mom

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Leman, Kevin.

First-time mom : getting off on the right foot from infancy to first grade / Kevin Leman.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-8423-6038-7 (hc) — ISBN 0-8423-6039-5 (pbk) — ISBN 0-8423-6040-9 (mass paper)

I. Child rearing. 2. Parenting. 3. Motherhood. I. Title.

HQ769.L375 2004

649'.1—dc22

2003020546

ISBN 0-8423-7383-7 (Int'l Edition)

Printed in the United States of America

09 08 07 06 05 04
7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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INTRODUCTION

The Adventure of a Lifetime

Welcome to the adventure of a lifetime!

If you're like most first-time moms, you're probably a little stunned to find out you're going to be a parent. You may be pregnant, soon to birth a child, or have recently birthed a child. You may be in the process of choosing a child through domestic or international adoption. Or you may recently have brought that child home. You may be married or single. But no matter how you've become a parent, as a first-time mom you have lots of questions, not to mention these biggies:

- How can I be the best mom for this child?
- Will this child be like me in any way? In personality, talents, or looks?
- Should I get her on a regular sleeping and eating schedule, or go with the flow?
- How do I know if he's getting what he needs to grow up healthy?
- What are some good ways to make sure I bond with this child—for a lifetime?
- How can I stop my child from crying so much? Am I doing something wrong?

- Will she go through those “terrible twos” of toddlerhood? I’m already starting to sweat.
- How should I handle discipline? Is spanking okay? At what age do kids understand discipline?
- Should we have just one child—or more?

And this is just the start of your questions. You could probably fill in a whole other page of your own additional ones. It’s no wonder! Becoming a mom is a huge life transition,—one of constant surprises, joy, anxiety, sacrifices, and also tremendous rewards.

One of the reasons I’ve chosen to write this book is to help first-time mothers like you see that this thing called being a mom is actually a little easier than you might think. For thousands of years, parents have raised firstborns without any books, seminars, radio programs, or television specials telling them what to do, so take a deep breath. You won’t be perfect, and your child won’t be perfect. But together you will adjust to being a family, and you’ll have a lot of laughter along the way.

This book will take you and your child from infancy through first grade (another time of transition where your child is away from you for a significant portion of the day). It will help you know what to expect as you bring your child home, what to focus on during the first ten days (when you and your child are so “new” to each other), and will help you relax as you realize that “The Big Three” (eating, sleeping, and crying) of your child’s needs aren’t as difficult as you might think. Then we’ll journey on through the first year, talk about the ten most common first-time parenting mistakes. (Don’t worry, we won’t pick on you. Every parent on the planet makes a host of these mistakes. But you can be smart. Being aware of the mistakes is your best



tool to building a healthy environment for your child to grow up in.)

We'll also talk about the issue of work. For those of you who already have careers and are used to working outside the home, we'll give you some things to think about in making your decision of whether or not to return to the workplace or to do work (other than raising your child, which is already a twenty-four-hour, seven-day-a-week job) from your home. I realize that for some of you, especially you single moms, the choice to work or not to work may not really be viable. In order to provide for your family, you will need to work. Let me assure you: The material in this chapter is not meant to be guilt-inducing but to give you practical information to help you make an informed decision that will be the best for you and your family in the long-term.

If you're married, you'll find chapter 7, "Caring for Your 'Other Child,'" helpful. No, we're not putting down guys (after all, I'm one myself), but the guy in your life may be going through more of a transition in becoming a father than you might think. I'll also reveal how your own firstborn, secondborn, and lastborn characteristics are affecting your and your spouse's parenting styles more than you might think.

Then, as your child grows, we'll plunge into "Toddler Time" and share the secret "Tricks of the Trade." Wonder when you should talk with your kids about sex? You can do it much earlier than you think, and still be age-appropriate (see chapter 11, "The Birds and the Bees"). And we'll even address other down-the-road questions you'll probably have: *Should I have another child? If so, will I love that child as much as I love my firstborn? And how will my firstborn handle a new sibling?*

You owe it to yourself—and your firstborn—to find out as much as you can about this new role of parenting and how babies work. So go ahead—plunge in!

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Welcome Home

Good for you. You did it.

You're a parent! Maybe it happened through birth. Perhaps it was through adoption. But the agony of waiting through hours of labor or months of paperwork has finally culminated in you getting to meet your special treasure face-to-face. And now you're bringing that wonderful, incredible child home with you!

All sorts of emotions are flooding through you—a mixture of joy, wonder, and if you're smart, most likely a little healthy fear too. You wonder, *What kind of parent will I be? What will this child be like?*

If you birthed this child, you went to Lamaze class, wearing your sweats, carrying your pillows, and watching as your classmates' bellies bloated to ever-increasing proportions and then dropped with the weight of a bowling ball. You learned how to breathe in different patterns during those week-day-evening classes, while on the weekends you shopped in baby stores for your first crib, changing table, and baby clothes. You've scoured several books to find just the right name, insisting that no child of yours will ever be called Buford or Betty.

You suffered through months of restless, sleepless, and

seemingly eternal nights. You might have enjoyed the extra calories you could take in, but the sickness, nausea, backache, and swollen ankles you could have done without.

When the day finally came, you had five people in one small room, all telling you what to do. They all seemed so sure of themselves and, to be fair, encouraging of you. But it didn't take long for you to realize that you were the only one in the room who was in true pain.

Before you had the Epidural, you grabbed and clenched your fists, you thought words you never thought you would think, your throat was as dry as a desert, and all they would give you were those pitiful little ice chips, parceled out as if they cost a million dollars apiece—and yes, I know you were pushing as hard as you could. (I also happen to know that you wanted to punch out three or four people in the room.)

But as that special little gift from God worked her way down your birth canal and suddenly popped her head out, and those tiny shoulders worked their way through your body, you finally heard the delightful cry of your newborn. The doctor asked your husband if he'd like to cut the umbilical cord. A quick glance at your husband's queasy complexion told you he was in no shape to do anything.

And when that twenty-inch child was laid upon your breast, you buried your chin into your chest to get as good a look as possible at this new miracle, saying to yourself, *She's so beautiful. I can't believe she's mine.*

Or perhaps you became a parent through adoption. You spent months or years researching just the right people who could help you find “the child of your heart.” You talked with multiple agencies, attorneys, agonized over how to become a parent, wondered *if* you would ever become a parent, investigated domestic and international routes, and, in hope, waded through enough paperwork to make you completely

dizzy. If you had to travel internationally, you had doctor checkups too—and more painful shots than you want to remember.

Then all the feverish activity stopped, and the real waiting began. Even though you weren't physically pregnant, you were *emotionally* pregnant—waiting with longing for anywhere from months to years for your child. Perhaps you sat in a rocker, hand-stitching a baby blanket or dreaming your way through a baby-name book. Or perhaps you held off, worried that your heart would break if you didn't get a child. And then you got “the call” or “that first sweet picture.” And you fell in love with that child from the first instant. Your world spun into the feverish activity. You did what you didn't dare to do before: bought a crib, decorated a baby's room, packed a bag with diapers, lotions, and all the essentials.

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When you saw your child's face for the first time, you saw the realization of years of hopes, the joy after the pain of infertility or miscarriage. And your awe in holding that child was mixed with a pang of pain—knowing someone else's sacrifice to bring this child into your life. As you headed home, you vowed to be the absolute best parent you could be for this truly special child.

So, whether through birth or chosen through adoption, your firstborn has come into this life with a great *entrée*. Now the question is, what are you going to do with her?

WHAT HAVE WE DONE?

Remember: This isn't just an ordinary kid that you've brought home. She's a firstborn. It's not that subsequent children in your family will be chopped liver, but firstborns are a special breed (and, after all, the subject of this book!).

Although you may not be able to believe it looking at your tiny bundle of little toes and miniature fingers, nestled deep inside that baby blanket is a little Judge Judy or Judge Wapner.

Firstborns have a knack at excelling. You already know plenty of them. You've seen them in the movies or on television—Sharon Stone, Michelle Pfeiffer, Nicole Kidman, Sandra Bullock, Harrison Ford, Oprah Winfrey, Bill Cosby. They're all firstborns. You've read about them in your history books—George Washington, Jimmy Carter, Harry Truman, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and a whole host of other presidents. You've seen them excel in business (it seems that just about every CEO is a firstborn), and you've probably read some of their books—those of Dr. James Dobson (actually, since he's an only child, we'll call him a super firstborn!), Dr. D. James Kennedy, and William Shakespeare, to name just a few.

Firstborns are the generals of our world. Frequently exacting, very rule-conscious, normally conservative, your firstborn will probably be your most reliable child, if you have more than one child. The chances of him or her being an astronaut, engineer, or CPA are higher than you can imagine.

Despite your best efforts, this child will get more individual attention from you than any other children who might join your family down the road. For your part, you'll probably have higher expectations for this child than all of your other children combined (though I hope this book will challenge your thinking in that area). Why will all this be so? Think about it—this child is now your only child. She doesn't have to wait in front of the television while you fix dinner for another child. For one year, two years, three years, or maybe even four years (or a lifetime, if this firstborn is your only child), this baby will have you all to herself. Everything

she does will be new to both of you. You'll clap for her first steps, coo over her first spit-up, and probably take pictures of her first bath. Her "baby book" will bulge with photographs, mementos, and keepsakes.

Down the road, if you do have more than one child, when the last child spits up, you'll probably either wait until bedtime to clean the shirt or ask your firstborn to grab a washcloth. When the middle child starts walking, you may mention it to your husband when he gets home from work, but other than that, you may think, *Yeah, it's about that time.* You'll probably buy a baby book for the middle child, but when he turns five you'll feel guilty for how empty and slim it is, compared to the firstborn's book.

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Why is this? Because you've already seen everything a baby can do one, two, or three times before!

The extra attention a firstborn receives gives him a "performer's" mentality. He learns early on that he's there to meet expectations. This has the negative effect of creating some anxiety but the positive effect of making him really want to please you by being outstanding. Consequently, he'll wear responsibility and leadership like a pair of comfortable slippers.

So take heart—you've got an opportunity to raise a child who's a great leader and contributor. I've raised three firstborns, so I know what I'm talking about.

LIFE WITH A FIRSTBORN

"Now Dr. Leman," some of you might be saying, "how can anyone have *three* firstborns?"

Our true firstborn, Holly, came before all the other kids. Our second "firstborn," Kevin, was actually our third child, but as the first and only male he has taken on many firstborn

characteristics. And our youngest surprise child, Lauren, is six years younger than her nearest sibling making her, in effect, a firstborn in many ways. After all, her siblings were all in school by the time she was born, so she has received from us all the extra attention a firstborn would receive.

They want to achieve.

Here's what life is like with a firstborn. I'll use Lauren as an example, since Holly is now thirty years old and out on her own.

6 Just after Easter break, I was taking Lauren, an extremely conscientious student, to her third-grade class. Lauren, believe it or not, was studying Latin. Even though as a psychologist I've spent a good bit of my life studying human nature, I have to confess that I never anticipated driving my eight-year-old daughter to school while she read Latin in the front seat.

Curious that Lauren was working so hard on the first day after a vacation, I asked, "Do you have a test in Latin today?"

"No," Lauren said, "I'm just reviewing my verbs."

As a lastborn, the only time I "reviewed" my verbs was when the neighborhood tough guy, Woolly Bully Wayne, used to teach me dirty words!

That's the positive side of a firstborn—they really do want to achieve. But that drive to achieve can have a negative side too. One semester Lauren's grades suddenly dropped from an A to a C. There's not a C thing I can think of about Lauren, so my wife, Sande, and I immediately went down to the school to see if we could find out what was going on.

As we sat down with Lauren's teacher, she explained that the big thing at Lauren's table was who gets done first. The first student to complete an assignment carries a great deal

of clout in Lauren's peer group. Well, Lauren, by her nature, is not a hurry-up kind of a person. She can do A-level work, but not if she rushes. I remember several instances when Lauren would work on a homemade birthday card for three days or even a week; she doesn't just grind them out in five minutes like so many kids do. But a firstborn will usually rise to any challenge, particularly one that builds a sense of esteem and accomplishment, so Lauren sacrificed quality for speed—to become an integral part of a peer group.

They need to learn that failure is a part of life.

The normal firstborn wants to excel. Adding to this already inherent desire are overblown parental expectations—even more so because this is a first child. Many parents today attempt to build their own self-esteem by pushing their children to excel at everything. They view second place as losing out to first place, rather than being well above average, which is quite wonderful in itself. Firstborns quickly pick up this mentality and run with it; they are the family's flag bearers.

However, as you'll see later, I believe the home ought to be a place where kids learn to fail, because failure is a part of life. It isn't something to be feared; it's something you learn from. And then you pick yourself up and go on. But you'll probably have a harder time putting that philosophy into practice with your firstborn than you will with any later children.

They are examples for later (if any) siblings.

There's yet another element that makes firstborns so different from later children. Because your firstborn is older, his younger siblings will look up to him with awe. As the baby of my family, I wanted to do everything my older brother did. He was my biggest hero, and I wanted to be just like him.

The oldest-born child is usually the strongest, smartest, and biggest in the family. If he has several younger siblings, by the time they catch up to him, he's already moved out of the house!

That's all the more reason to raise your firstborn right. If your younger children look up to him, you want him to set a good example. Though it's likely that at least one of the younger siblings will eventually rebel against his example, you still want the example to be there.

Even though I tell first-time parents all this information in my seminars and counseling practice, many still fall into the first-time-parent syndrome. And so will you. My wife, Sande, and I did too. You probably *will* expect too much from your firstborn. You will be stricter with him than with any of your other children. You will follow his progress more closely than all of your other children combined. More likely than not, however, this child will ultimately reward you for that attention.

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GET READY FOR THE TINY TYRANT!

Two months ago, it was just you, if you're a single parent, or you and your husband, if you're married.

If you're a single parent, you're used to making decisions on your own—getting advice from others and then making the final call. If you're married, formally or informally, you two have worked out a compromise for who has what kind of power and influence in your family decisions. Like most couples, you've probably grown fairly comfortable with this arrangement. The lines have been drawn, both of you understand how it works, and you've reached a relative state of peace.

All that is about to change.

She'll take over your life.

This child, as innocent as she seems, and as docile as she appears, will immediately begin to formulate a game plan to completely take over your life, your home, your checkbook, and every second of your day. I'm not kidding you, and I'm not exaggerating. It's human nature. Your child is going to figure out how to manipulate you. Consciously or unconsciously, she's going to explore what buttons need to be pushed in order to get you to do what she wants you to do.

Are you motivated by fear? She'll learn to prey on that. Do you give in to relentless whining? She'll figure that one out soon enough. Are you persuaded by hostile rebellion? If so, she'll be all over you.

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She'll have a strong sense of order.

You'll always have a power struggle with this child. By nature, first children tend to be a very meticulous breed. Holly wouldn't accept it when I told her, "Oh, honey, we'll be leaving around nine o'clock." If I tried that, she'd say, "But how long after nine o'clock? Or are we leaving before nine o'clock? What do you mean 'around nine o'clock?'"

I had to learn to say, "Holly, we're going to leave at 9:05."

And at 9:06, I'd get a firm reminder: "Dad, we're running late!"

Firstborns have a need for order. They like to be in charge, and for good reason: They usually are!

She'll lead the pack and figure everything out.

It's like this. I have a friend who runs road races and marathons. I tried to point out to him once that the marathon got its name from a 26.2 mile run accomplished by a messenger who delivered the news and then promptly died, but my

friend didn't get the hint. Because he's an accomplished runner, he has to do something that the vast majority of people who enter races don't worry about: He has to know the course. When there's a good possibility you'll be leading the race, you can't just follow the pack. The vast majority of runners can show up ten minutes before the start, knowing there will always be people in front that they can follow to the course's end.

My marathoner friend's need to know the course is the family role of the firstborn. They are going to be in semicharge of any younger siblings for their entire lives. When you bring home baby number two, three, four, or even (don't gasp, we haven't reached my number yet!) five, each one of those kids can look around them to see what's expected of them and to determine how things are run. Your firstborn will never have that. With the later children, the firstborn is proudly thinking to herself, *Been there, done that. I know this house. I know these parents. I've got everything figured out.* You don't have to give them the role of person in charge; they'll just assume it!

Because they operate with the notion that they're in charge, firstborns tend to be more stubborn. Though Sande and I still can't figure out how Holly did it, one time she managed to somehow "pole vault" over the top of her crib when we were a few minutes behind schedule in getting her up.

But Lauren, our youngest child, would have happily stayed in her crib till she was five years old! Lauren was born in August. We spend the summers in New York state, so Lauren's first "bedroom" was a walk-in closet, about twelve feet by eight feet. She loved it in there. In the morning we'd catch her talking to herself, singing and making noises, as contented and happy a baby as you would ever find. If we

came back an hour and a half later, she'd still be keeping herself pleasantly occupied.

Now, if we had tried that with Holly Leman—leaving her in a closet for an hour or more—our firstborn would have had the hinges off the door within five minutes and figured out how to call the police within ten. I'd be writing this book in jail, because Holly would find the best lawyer in town.

THERE'S A FIRST TIME FOR EVERYONE

By now some of you may be asking skeptically, “Are firstborns and middleborns and lastborns really all *that* different?”

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The answer is, “More than you'll ever be able to believe.” For starters, keep in mind that your firstborn baby has just as much experience being a baby as you have being a mom! When the secondborn rolls around, you'll have been a mom for a good eighteen to thirty-six months (or more). But this first child has you matched from the moment he arrives.

That allows him to play some fun “games.” Holly was a master at this. When she was thirsty, if I brought her water from the bathroom, she insisted that she wanted kitchen water; if I brought kitchen water, Holly of course wanted bathroom water.

You think I made that mistake with Krissy (our second child)? Not a chance! Krissy never knew where the water came from. By the time child number two came around, I had learned not to overexplain things or to set myself up for another power struggle.

But please don't look at these firstborn characteristics as a negative; many positive qualities come from them. As I already mentioned, the overwhelming number of society's leaders, government officials, CEOs, and professionals are

firstborns. Your first child will probably amaze you with her spunk.

I remember when Holly decided to withdraw herself from preschool. She had enjoyed the first few months until some politically correct educators decided to transform what had been a good school into an “experimental learning center.” It didn’t take long for Holly to get fed up with this nonsense. One night she matter-of-factly announced that she wasn’t going to go to school anymore.

“Honey, you have to go to preschool,” I said.

“But I don’t like the preschool anymore,” Holly answered.

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What Holly didn’t realize is that her mom and I had already had some serious discussions about our growing concerns with the school. Just for fun, however, I decided to continue this conversation with Holly to see where she would go with it.

“Holly, if you aren’t going back to preschool, you have to call them and let them know. You can’t just stop showing up.” Keep in mind—Holly was just three years old at the time.

“But Daddy,” Holly said, “I don’t know their phone number.”

I, as Holly’s doctor-degreed dad, wasn’t about to give in to a three-year-old. So with my vast amounts of training and study, I figured I’d call her bluff. I gave Holly the phone number, deciding to force the issue.

Well, I soon learned that you don’t force the issue with a kid like Holly. She actually called the school! At three years old!

“Hello? This is Holly Leman, and I’m not coming to school no more.”

Take that, school! I’m in charge! That was exactly what she was saying. And that left me, as her dad, with a lot of explaining to do.

It all goes to show that you need to be prepared to raise this first child. Firstborns are challenging, but in many ways I envy what you have in store for you. I have thoroughly enjoyed Holly, as well as the other two children in my family who share some firstborn characteristics. Firstborns are challenging, but they are also bright, exceptional children. They can be a great joy!

ME? CHANGE THE WORLD?

The truth is, if you raise this first child right, you're going to change the world. And that's not an overstatement. The confidence of being a firstborn, coupled with a positive parenting experience, will usually result in a child who makes the world a much different place. She might be a teacher, a CEO, a very responsible parent, or president of the United States—but you can bet she's going to accomplish something. Firstborns are far more likely to be successful, to gain financial independence, and even to look after you in your old age.

After a few months of having this child in your home, you may be tempted to go back to “life as normal,” trying to hold on to how things were before this child arrived. Please don't. Invest all you can into this child. Give her the love she needs, the time she deserves, and do all you can to “be there” for her. Your decision to become a parent means that you'll need to make some sacrifices in order to assume the added responsibility of a child. But please know that raising this child will be the most influential thing you can ever accomplish—and a true gift that can change the world around you in ways you never dreamed.

You have a great adventure ahead of you!



FAVORITE BABY GAMES



For some “mom and baby” fun time, try these seven classic games that are guaranteed to make baby laugh and you, too. And then invent your own!*

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Itsy Bitsy Spider

You’ve all probably heard of this one:

*The itsy bitsy spider went up the water spout,
Down came the rain and flushed the spider out;
Out came the sun and dried up all the rain
And the itsy bitsy spider went up the spout again.*

While singing this song, walk your fingers up from your baby’s toes toward her chest. When the spider gets flushed out, use both hands and glide them down baby’s body—she’ll love that. When you say, “Out came the sun,” throw your hands widely away from each other in melodramatic fashion, and just watch your baby’s eyes grow wide (you should make your own eyes grow wide, too). Then start “walking” up baby’s body again.

Games like this combine three things that babies love most: eye contact, touching, and singing.

*Since nursery rhymes are part of a very fluid oral tradition, these versions may vary from other published sources or ones you already use with your family.

Little Bunny Foo Foo

This song works best with vigorous hand motions and melodramatic voicing.

*Little Bunny Foo Foo, hopping through the forest
(make rabbit ears with your hands, or put two fingers
together from one hand and make them “hop” on
your other hand)*

*Scooping up the field mice and bopping them on
the head (gently pat baby on the head).*

*Down came the good fairy and she said, (shake
your finger and use a forceful, funny voice, like you’re
giving a big, melodramatic lecture)*

*“Little Bunny Foo Foo, I don’t want to see you
scooping up the field mice
And bopping them on the head.*

*I gave you three chances and you didn’t behave.
Now you’re a goon!
POOF!*

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Patty-cake

Yeah, you know this one too.

*Patty-cake, patty-cake, baker’s man,
Bake me a cake as fast as you can.
Put it in the oven and what do you see?
Out comes a cake for baby and me.*

Once again, the key here is to make hand movements go with the words. Pat baby’s hands or feet together as you are making the cake; speed up your motions when you get to “as fast as you can.” With the words “for baby and me,” point to baby and then point to you.

NOTES

1. Cited in Steve Martin: *The Magic Years* by Morris Walker (New York: S.P.I. books, 2001), 1.
2. Psalm 139:14.
3. Based on a story by S. L. Price, "A Clean Start," *Sports Illustrated*, 28 January 2002, 58ff.
4. "Families and the Labor Market, 1969–1999: Analyzing the 'Time Crunch,'" A Report by the Council of Economic Advisors, May 1999, 13; and Robert Putnam and Christine Goss, "It's About Time," *The San Francisco Chronicle*, 24 September 2000; both cited in Brian Robertson, "Why Daycare Subsidies Do Not Help Parents or Kids," published by the Family Research Council.
5. Associated Press, "Study: Child's Skills Slowed If Mom Returns to Work Early," 18 July 2002.
6. See Ephesians 6:1-3 for a commandment to parents—and a wonderful promise.
7. Cited in Carolyn Jabs, "How to Raise a Sexually Healthy Child," *Redbook*, June 2001, 168.
8. Based on the account provided in *The Majors* by John Feinstein (New York: Back Bay Books, 2000), 318.
9. Isaiah 40:31.



DR. KEVIN LEMAN'S "A CHILD'S TEN COMMANDMENTS TO PARENTS"

1. My hands are small; please don't expect perfection whenever I make a bed, draw a picture, or throw a ball. My legs are short; please slow down so I can keep up with you.
2. My eyes have not seen the world as yours have; please let me explore safely; don't restrict me unnecessarily.
3. Housework will always be there. I'm only little for such a short time—please take time to explain things to me about this wonderful world, and do so willingly.
4. My feelings are tender; please be sensitive to my needs; don't nag me all day long. (You wouldn't want to be nagged for your inquisitiveness.) Treat me as you would like to be treated.
5. I am a special gift from God; please treasure me as God intended you to do, holding me accountable for my actions, giving me guidelines to live by, and disciplining me in a loving manner.
6. I need your encouragement, but not your praise, to grow. Please go easy on the criticism; remember, you can criticize *the things* I do without criticizing *me*.
7. Please give me the freedom to make decisions concerning myself. Permit me to fail, so I can learn from my mistakes.
8. Please don't do things over for me. Somehow that makes me feel that my efforts didn't quite measure up to your expectations. I know it's hard, but please don't compare me with my brother or my sister.
9. Please don't be afraid to leave for a weekend together. Kids need vacations from parents, just as parents need vacations from kids. Besides, it's a great way to show us kids that your marriage is special.
10. Please take me to Sunday school and church regularly, setting a good example for me to follow. I enjoy learning more about God.

