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Metro Lutheran  
Positive Parenting  
Marilyn Sharpe

## We Are A Tribe: Parents Banding Together

### Our Father ...

Matthew 6: 9

When we pray the Lord's Prayer, we begin, "Our Father..." That means we have a new relationship with one another. We are family.

Daily, our children relate to one another. They connect at school, on the bus, at the park, in the neighborhood. They play together, experience conflict, resolve disagreements, and collaborate.

But, what has happened to the parents and other caring adults? In many of our neighborhoods, we no longer have front porches, sit on the front steps, or chat in the front yards, even when weather is balmy. We pull into our driveway, use a remote opener to raise the garage door, and disappear into the house or apartment building without seeing, greeting, or connecting with another adult. If we have a porch or deck, it is most often on the back of the house or building, cut off from neighbors by a fence. As adults who care for and care about children, we are cut off from other adults, who also care for and care about children and youth.

What is the price we pay for this distance and isolation? Often, we are lonely, feeling like we are the only one who deals with problems with our children, challenges with the schools, concerns about our economic stability, fear about our jobs ... or lack of a job. We don't have others who have walked the same path, to reassure us, resource us, norm all of the things we are going through in our lives, in our families, in our homes. Recent research on families reveals that parents are spending appreciably more time with their children than parents did a decade ago. That is good news. The bad news that accompanies it is that family units are "cocooning" and have much less time with others who are not in that nuclear family.

I have the privilege of working with parents in three different settings, hearing their stories and struggles, celebrating their wisdom and resilience. One thing I have learned from them is that most families deal with the same issues and concerns and challenges ... but almost no parents know that. They feel alone, unsupported, and uniquely unsuccessful.

What is the price kids pay for parents and caregivers being isolated from one another? Kids don't benefit from having their parents supported and offered more resources and ideas than any one household marshals on its own. They play their parents off against all the others. ("How come I'm the only first grader that has to go to bed at 8pm?" "All of the other kids get a cell phone in fourth grade." "But all of the other high school kids stay out after midnight.")

Children and youth need their caregiving adults to band together, to share values and expectations for behavior, to hold the line, wherever they are. A wonderful mother of an older teen, who also works as a nanny for four young children, connects with all of the other parents and caregivers on her block to clarify mutual expectations. They declare, "We are a tribe!" Kids will check to see if all will hold the line and enforce the expectations. What a fabulous safety net they have built under all of the kids in their homes and in their community.

So, how might you build a tribe where you are?

## FAMILY ACTIVITIES

1. Get out of your home or apartment and walk around your neighborhood. Stop to talk to others who are out. Introduce yourself. Get to know them.
2. Ask your church and school to host opportunities for families to gather. Wear name tags. Play get acquainted games. Gather names, addresses, and phone numbers.
3. When your child has a play date or goes to another child's home to do homework, connect with the parent. Share your core values. Ask them about theirs. Invite other parents to support your values and theirs when supervising your child.
4. If your son or daughter is in scouts, band, sports, or a school program, invite the parents of the other kids to your home for coffee and dessert. Take time to exchange contact information. Share the challenges and delights of raising a child this age. See what common rules you all have and agree to support them for all the kids, when you have them at your home or are at a game or event.
5. Gather parents and caregivers in your neighborhood and develop a list of shared rules and values for all of the kids. Work on consistency from house to house, family to family. Be a tribe, on behalf of all the children. Thank God for the opportunity to collaborate on raising wonderful children. It does take an intentional village to raise God's children!