



**ERIN
HARREL**

of Cape Coral has a PhD in education and is the mother of three children.

Perceptions of love

Through the **eyes of children**

February has long been known as the month of “love” and “romance.” I often take for granted the fact that my children (and husband) should know that I love them. I tell them frequently that I love them, and I think I do many “things” that would show them that I love them.

However, I wondered if they knew how much I loved them. After all, I can be a “tough love” mom: I set high expectations and expect them to meet them. I don’t cook separate meals for each one of them, but expect them to eat what is on the table. I support the teacher when they keep my children in from recess for missed work. Many of my friends take a much softer approach to parenting.

Parenting is not always easy, but no matter what the circumstances are, we always want to make sure our children know we love them. So, I decided to ask.

After a bit of prodding, here are their responses:

Jude, age 11: “I know my mom and dad love me because they make me stay



Photo special to SW FL Parent & Child

Jude, Riley and Maggie Harrel enjoy time with friends Joe, Jordan and Christine at River Ranch.

out of trouble. They are always with me and make sure that I behave. I don’t always like it, but I know they love me or they would let me do things I might get in trouble for.

“They also take me to my favorite place to hang out: River Ranch. My friend, Joe, and I get to ride our four-wheelers and just hang out with everyone. I like that my parents enjoy hanging out with us. My mom and dad also say my prayers with me every night. I just know they love me.”

Riley, age 9: “I know my parents love me because they give me lots of hugs and kisses. When we want something, they

try and get it as fast as they can. They take us to places they know we will enjoy. They come to all of our activities and tell us how good we do. My mom and dad take time off from work to go on field trips and enjoy time with us. When we are uncomfortable, they make us feel better. When we are sad, they make us feel happy. They don’t let us misbehave so we know people want to be around us and so we aren’t the kind of kids that are in detentions all of the time.”

Maggie, age 6: “I know you love me because you always kiss me and call me your little sweetie pie. You hug me up all day. You

always say I am so cute, and tell me you love me. You take us lots of places, like River Ranch, where I get to play with the big kids. You always want me to go places with you, and you are sad when you leave me.”

Kids are so funny. I never dreamed they would appreciate the fact that we strongly encourage good behavior. I know from years of teaching that kids need/want boundaries, but I always struggle with how much guidance they need.

I am glad to know that our children enjoy our company and appreciate our firm but fair concept of parenting. We love taking them to our camp at River Ranch where they have the autonomy to be “worry free” kids. They get filthy dirty and love every minute of it — that in and of itself should demonstrate our love for them.

Greg and I love the kids more than life itself and count our blessings every day that we have been blessed with three great children. By reflecting on their feelings and perceptions of our love, I know I can become an even better parent. 