



Formative Parenting

Cultivating Character in Children

A Ministry of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Immaculata, Pennsylvania

Parent Guide for Fostering School Success – Part 1 HOME ENVIRONMENTS for SCHOOL SUCCESS

School success and self-esteem are flip sides of a single coin. Student success and satisfaction in school and the school environment affects the self-esteem of a child and self-esteem shapes the attitude with which a child approaches school and school-related tasks. Self-esteem has its roots in the home as does school success which depends so much upon prosocial behavior, self-acceptance, well-formed identity, and academic progress. It is from parents that children make their first conclusions about self worth, competence and importance to others. And it is from parents that a child first learns to be accountable for herself and to act responsibly toward others. Parents teach through word and example that effort is more important than results, and that learning from a process has value in itself apart from the product. Parents demonstrate that mistakes can become stepping stones to improvement and, therefore, need not be considered failure. Parents convey to a child that she is made in the image of God and is called to make appropriate life-giving choices at home, at school and in private. Parents teach a child accountability for his choices, behaviors, actions or in-actions. Parents establish the foundation on which teachers build and polish.

How does a parent do all of this? Parents establish the foundation of positive self-esteem primarily through attentive **presence**. Presence is personal nearness or connectedness on a physical, social, emotional, or spiritual level; awareness without words, open-handed readiness to respond and receive, reverence for the other, and on-going conscious attention and connectiveness over time. In addition to presence parents maintain a home environment that incorporates effective communication, consistency, accountability, and age-appropriate expectations.

This letter suggests practices that facilitate effective communication, consistency and growth in accountability. Decide which characteristics describe your home environment *as a pattern* under *usual, repeated circumstances*. May the results speak words of wisdom for you, affirm your parenting style, and serve as a guide to determine how to best provide for the ongoing identity formation and self-esteem development of your child.

Parent Practices of Effective Home Environments that Support School Success

Effective Communication

Are you present to your child? connected emotionally, mentally, spiritually? quality attention? eye contact? Does your body language convey conscious attention?

Do you speak with your child on a consistent basis? waiting for responses? seeking clarification and further development to the initial answer? asking questions that require more than a “yes/no” response?

Do you secure your child’s attention before you speak? (eye contact, touch, name, . . .)

Do you expect recognition/acknowledgment -- and wait for it -- when you address your child?

Do you have evidence that your child “heard” you?

- Can your child re-state an adequate interpretation of the conversation?
- Does your child follow the direction you gave or respond appropriately?

Do you determine mutual definitions of terms during behavior-related discussions and thereby avoid verbal manipulation or “semantic games”?

Does the tone of your voice convey your intention (expectation vs. suggestion; direction vs. option, etc.)?

When correction is needed or suggested by a teacher or school situation, do you MIRROR objectively?

- Do you ask your child to summarize the incident and then ask clarifying questions about the summary?

• Do you, through questioning, serve as a mirror that causes your child to name his own behavior or choice, its effects, and why it is unacceptable (thereby owning his behavior) as opposed to telling your child what you think the issue is (This removes responsibility from the child.)

• Do you ask your child to identify why you, the parent, are displeased or concerned or why the teacher is displeased or concerned? rather than tell your child why you consider her behavior as unacceptable or unappreciated?

MAXIM: Acknowledging one’s own choices and accepting responsibility for one’s own choices leads to a sense of OWNERSHIP. Only ownership makes change, growth and improvement possible.

Consistency and Accountability

Do you “say what you mean” and “mean what you say”? Does your child think you do?

Do you “follow through” on verbalized or understood decisions and the advertised consequences? Do you stick to your decisions? Does your child think you do?

Do you establish reasonable limits / boundaries / expectations / structures to assure security, consistent predictability, continuity, and self-confidence? Can your child name the limits?

Do you, on a regular basis, expect accountability and follow-through from your child? Does your child think that you do?

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