



Formative Parenting

Cultivating Character in Children

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

Parent as Mentor, Part 2 **MENTOR CONFIDENCE AND COMPETENCE**

Parents can mentor children towards life-giving attitudes by using “**mantras**” (quotations) that seep into the soul over time. The often-repeated thoughts flow into action. The sayings of my parents left indelible wisdom within me. For instance, on the topic of friendship, Mom advised: “Remember, Pat, and bear in mind that a faithful friend is hard to find. So when you’ve found one just and true, don’t change the old one for the new.” And Dad said, “Show me your friends and I’ll tell you what you are.” What quotations about life skills or character shaped your soul during your formative years at home?

Though oral repetition over time is sufficient for soul-mastery, some parents post visual reminders of favorite character-building thoughts. I’ve seen store-bought plaques on walls, and hand-made paper banners above doorways. Some families place slogans on the refrigerator, the bathroom mirror, above a light switch, on the family prayer-table, or on a mini-easel that serves as a sacred environment on the meal table. Words can be powerful. Mantras can generate formative discussion within the family.

This newsletter offers two such thoughts that can mentor competence and confidence within children. Consider the mentoring contained in this simple poem: “**Good, better, best! I will never rest until my good is better and my better is my best. That’s the secret to success.**” The mantra begins with the premise that we are good, and so we are. We are creatures of a loving God who formed us into God’s own image. We are gifted with intellect and free will and called to make choices in freedom that lead to life right here and right now, as well as in eternity. God knows all things and, therefore, God cannot make a mistake. God knew what God was doing when God called us into creation. We entered creation “good.” The choices that we make lead us to better ourselves or to hurt ourselves.

This poem concentrates on “better” choices. When a child chooses to practice self-control, or go the extra mile for another person, or stick to a homework assignment when it is difficult, or invite others to play that child becomes better by the day. And when being better today than I was yesterday becomes my pattern, soon I develop my personal best. All the while these positive choices are shaping the way that I perceive myself and the way that others relate to me. When I make good choices I like me, you like me, and the day works well. Notice! This poem is about personal best, not competition. God does not call us into competition. When I am striving to be my personal best, I am not envious about others or threatened by the accomplishments of others. Also my yardstick becomes the soul that God created and not the opinions of spectators or the messages in the world of advertisement.

Consider the wisdom contained in this aphorism: “**Plan your work and work your plan.**” This mantra points the way to competence and self-confidence. This mindset prizes goal setting, forethought, being proactive, and developing leadership. Goal setting engages children in critical thinking. It requires that:

- they recall from memory details that will be necessary to their plan
- they apply information accurately
- they gather the individual pieces that will be needed for the project
- they synthesize or reassemble pieces into a whole picture that fulfills their purpose
- they can evaluate without prejudice as to whether their plan will be effective
- they devise a way for checking on progress
- they adjust the original plan if it becomes advantageous

Goal setting is a skill that all ages can practice. A little child can plan out the details of her birthday party: theme, cake, games, invitations, etc., or how to set the dinner table. A middle school child can plan out the steps necessary to complete a book report. A high school child is capable of designing a program of diet and exercise.

This mantra or maxim is also the key to developing industry. Industry, finishing what you start, is crucial to positive self-esteem. Industry development is the core psychosocial task for children from ages 6-12. Positive resolution readies them for essential further development in adolescence and young adulthood. Children who establish a life pattern of planning their work and working their plan evolve into adults who are capable of future commitment and fidelity to vocation and responsibility.

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