



# 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 5 INITIATIVE PRACTICES**

Dear Parent,

At the root of successful businesses is an entrepreneur, a person who originates, organizes, manages, and assumes responsibility for an enterprise. At the core of school success is a child with a sense of initiative. It is a sense of being motivated within one's self to originate plans and conquer tasks. A child with a developing sense of initiative is a self-starter. He has his own ideas of what kinds of things to do and how he wants to do them, and he is not afraid to take on new tasks or to make a mistake. Rather than feel guilty when she makes a mistake, she learns from the mistake and applies the lessons in her future. In contrast, a child with an under-developed sense of initiative experiences a sense of guilt that leads her to hesitate to try new things for fear of making a mistake. She actually expects to fail before she attempts a given task. Consequently, she often resigns herself to settle for less than what she can be.

**INITIATIVE** development begins during the pre-school play years and needs reinforcement and exercise throughout the years in elementary school. Initiative is basic to the identity foundation needed for positive self-esteem. To the extent that a child has more positive experiences of initiative attempts than negative experiences, he will develop a sense of **DIRECTION** as a basic life strength and possess a sense **PURPOSE** as a basic life virtue. In order to grow in a sense of initiative your child needs to experience with consistency that process is more important than product and that mistakes can be building blocks instead of failure.

You can empower your child to grow in initiative by exposing her to varied experiences and providing the materials, tools, or resources for her to explore varied interests; by modeling how to recover after making a mistake; by encouraging risk-taking; by teaching through word and deed that what we learn during a process is as important, or more important, than the end result; by demonstrating that you value freedom that is seasoned with responsibility and consequences; and by having basic standards and deadlines to which you adhere.

This letter presents parent-suggested practices that develop a child's sense of **INITIATIVE at School**. Consider which practices 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 that Develop a Child's Sense of INITIATIVE AT SCHOOL**

The most common parent suggestions, offered by 93 parents of "successful" children include but are not limited to the following parenting practices, listed alphabetically:

**AVOID UNNECESSARY STRESS:** When a long term assignment is given, start talking about it, looking in an encyclopedia at home, and making a date to go to the library. Let your child choose his own topic. Set deadlines for individual parts. Avoid last minute stress. Make it the responsibility of your child to determine the materials that need to be gathered or purchased. Provide

transportation, if necessary, and finances but allow your child to assume responsibility for the purchases.

By grade six, if your child fails to plan ahead on a long-range project, permit her to take the consequence of being unprepared or permit her to take the consequence of being exhausted by missing sleep to finish the project.

When all is settled, discuss the situation, establish expectations, and make goals for future situations.

**BUILD CONFIDENCE:** Build confidence by working with your child on projects like learning multiplication tables, gymnastics, finding information for oral speeches, practicing oral speech delivery. If weekly “sharing topics” are assigned, let your child determine the topic. If she has trouble doing so, help her to identify areas of personal interest rather than choosing a topic for her.

**CREATE BOUNDARIES:** Model the practice: “You are responsible for getting your work done but allow time for us to help if you need help.” If your child does not hand in an assignment or complete it as assigned, allow your child to accept the consequence of the teacher. Do not write excuse notes for work not completed. The same applies to books, supplies, lunches, permission slips, projects, or gym equipment left in school or at home. Avoid the temptation to rescue or save your child from the unpleasant, natural consequences of irresponsibility or forgetfulness. Let the natural consequences follow. Do not take on the role of personal secretary.

**CULTIVATE LEADERSHIP:** Help your child to plan out and organize a time schedule for school projects. Initially “walk through” the steps together and work side by side. As the year progresses, decrease your active presence and help your child to assume leadership. Let your child describe ideas for school reports, contests, and projects. Help her plan a time line. Show interest in her progress, inquire about progress, and offer help with obtaining materials for research but otherwise, maintain a hands-off policy. Let the planning and accomplishment be her own. She is capable of doing the assignment. When you assume responsibility for your child’s tasks, you communicate to her that you believe she is lacking in some way. This undermines your child’s sense of initiative and self-worth.

**DEVELOP INDEPENDENCE:** Teach your child to be responsible for finding and gathering all school items, getting required parent signatures, packing the school bag before bedtime and, by grade three, to prepare and pack lunch. This includes being responsible to give notice when supplies need to be purchased. Let her be responsible for hot lunch slips, etc.

**ESTABLISH HOMEWORK EXPECTATIONS:** Hold your child responsible to contact classmates to get forgotten homework assignments or make-up work. Have your child do homework independent of you within a set time parameter but review it when finished. Establish the policy: “See if you can figure out your homework and

come to us (parents) if you do not understand it.” Encourage, review, and advise with projects but let your child do the work and use her own ideas and time. Advise her to refer to the encyclopedia and dictionary before resorting to you.

**EXPRESS ENTHUSIASM:** Show enthusiasm for child-initiated activities: talent show routine, running for student council, a role in a classroom or school play, reading at Church or school assembly, bake sales, raffle ticket sales, attempts to get extra credit opportunities, etc. Express pride for the initiative demonstrated, for jobs well done, and for the effort put into activities that are beyond those required of all students. Praise him not just for the quality of performance but with pride in the fact that the work and results are truly his.

**EXTEND LEARNING:** Encourage your child to do extra things for school, i.e., read books, create science projects, complete miscellaneous worksheets, read chapters not assigned, and enter optional essay or creative arts contests. Contribute by planning family outings to expand on school studies and teaching your child how to use a library computer to locate books for projects.

**PLAN AHEAD:** Take advantage of opportunities to teach how planning ahead can feed into the particular interests and wants of your child. For instance, inclusion in a hiking trip two weeks in the future requires the completion of specific projects by a preset deadline.

**PREPARE FOR REPORT CARDS:** Explain that you want no surprises on report card day. It is your child’s responsibility to provide ongoing information on school progress via dialogue, presenting graded work, tests, teacher referrals, etc. to be signed or examined. Teach your child how to question a teacher in a polite manner. Empower him to seek out a teacher’s help before his grade is affected negatively. Teach your child to try to negotiate for extra credit work if ever he does poorly on a particular assignment or test. It is an expression of personal pride and competence.

**VALUE RESPECTFUL QUESTIONING:** Help your child to learn the balance of respect for teachers and the responsibility to ask questions and represent herself and her interests. Discussions, shared stories, and role playing can give her the confidence she needs to initiate such interactions. Praise the value of asking questions at school. Encourage your child to realize that her contribution to a class is valuable to everyone. Urge her not to be afraid to answer or to ask a question.

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