



Formative Parenting

Cultivating Character in Children

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

Establishing a Foundation for Authentic Self-Esteem, Part 6 STUDENT-IDENTIFIED PRACTICES

Dear Parent,

Identity formation is at the heart of self-esteem. Identity is the sense that who I am to the outside world matches who I am within myself. Self-esteem means that I have a positive regard for this person that I am; that I value, admire and approve my identity. A solid foundation for the development of identity is fundamental for the ongoing soul formation and self-esteem of a child. Parents establish that foundation through parenting practices that support growth in personal security, autonomy, initiative and industry. **SECURITY** is a sense of trust, safety, predictability, and confidence that needs will receive predictable response from the significant people in one's life. **AUTONOMY** refers to a sense of healthful independence and inner authority that suggests the capability of making appropriate decisions for one's self. **INITIATIVE** involves a sense of inner motivation and the ability to originate plans and conquer tasks. **INDUSTRY** is having a sense of follow-through, diligence and systematic approach to tasks and responsibilities.

Previous issues of [Today's Catholic Teacher](#) expanded the meaning of each of the four elements of identity formation and offered parent-written suggestions of parent practices that support the development of each element within a child. This installment to the *Parent Partnership Handbook* reviews all four elements of identity formation by reporting what children believe their parents did for them that resulted in establishing a positive sense of security, autonomy, initiative, and industry. Fifty-three students from grades 6 through 12 were identified as children who display positive self-esteem on a consistent basis. The students represented 15 schools and met in grade groupings to articulate what kinds of parent practices fostered their own positive self-esteem. A sampling of the student research includes pro-active word cues associated with fostering growth in each of the four elements of identity. The student-identified practices parallel those suggested by the parents who were part of the research project.

May the voices of these children speak words of wisdom for you, affirm your parenting style and assist you to provide for the ongoing identity formation and self-esteem development of your child.

Student-Identified Parent Practices that Support Positive Identity Formation

Suggestions offered by 53 “successful” children from grades 6 through 12, include the following parenting practices:

SECURITY

(INQUIRE): My parents wanted to know where I was going, what I was doing, and always asked questions about my day.

(ENCOURAGE): I felt that my parents had trust and confidence in me to do my best. I was encouraged to do things that are difficult, to keep at things, and to find the good.

(CORRECT): When I did something wrong, I was corrected so that I would improve the next time. I was allowed to fail at things early on and to deal with the consequences.

(RESPECT): My conversations were kept confidential. I was not put down and I could voice my opinion at family discussions as an equal. My parents listened to me and did not degrade my contributions. My questions were always answered, no matter how silly.

(FAITHFULNESS): My parents always kept their word; promises were not broken.

(AVAILABILITY): I always had access to a parent when I needed someone to talk to or when I had a problem.

(INITIATE): My parents could sense my pain (physically and emotionally) and came to me to help and comfort. **(ASSURE):** My parents tell me I am doing fine and they make me feel worthwhile. They tell me to set goals and they show me how to do it.

AUTONOMY

[ASSERTIVENESS]: I was taught to think for myself and to express myself without offending adults. I was encouraged to recognize my emotions and feelings and to express them in words, not actions. I learned to control my anger.

(LEARN FROM MISTAKES): I was taught to learn from my mistakes, to realize that everybody makes them and to focus on how to fix my mistakes. I had to deal with the consequences.

(MACRO-MANAGE): My parents let me manage my activities and problems. I was in charge but they were there to help if needed.

[SELF-RELIANT]: When it comes to school projects, it is up to me to get it done; it is not done for me.

(BOUNDARIES): I was taught to not push things to the limit and to learn where the limits are.

(RESPONSIBILITY): I was given a lot of responsibility at a young age to help with house chores and to baby-sit.

INITIATIVE

(INDIVIDUALITY): Independence and different opinions were encouraged and it was okay for me not to follow the flock.

(FOLLOW THROUGH): I did projects with my Dad and after they got started, I would have to figure out what to do to get the job done.

(DEADLINES): I was given responsibility and expected to follow through without being reminded over and over.

(INDEPENDENCE): My parents gave me direction toward a decision but then allowed me to make the decision independently.

(PERSEVERANCE): I was taught never to quit when things got hard. I was told that if I tried, I could succeed. So I set goals and tried to beat them.

(SUPPORT): I was encouraged to try new things and was not criticized when I failed. I was shown ways to improve.

INDUSTRY

(EXAMPLE): I followed my Mom’s example of being involved and seeing a project through.

(TIME MANAGEMENT): I was allowed to take breaks when I wanted to.

(ORGANIZATION): I was shown that keeping things orderly allows me to finish projects faster. My parents taught me very early how to be organized. My binders and work was checked and I was given pointers on how to make my work more complete or neater.

(COMMITMENT): I was not allowed to quit anything mid-season.

(ACCOUNTABILITY): My parents were consistent and grounded me when I betrayed their trust.

(OWNERSHIP): It was family policy that if I didn’t like something such as class schedules or appointments, I had to make the change and handle communication.

This article originally appeared in the (April 1997) issue of *Today’s Catholic Teacher*, © Peter Li, Inc. Reproduced with permission. All rights reserved. This article is protected by United States copyright and other intellectual property laws and may not be reproduced, rewritten, distributed, disseminated, transmitted, displayed, published or broadcast, directly or indirectly, in any medium without the prior written permission of Peter Li, Inc.