

# CULTIVATING LEADERSHIP

## 5 ways to develop students' initiative

BY SR. PATRICIA M. MCCORMACK, IHM, EdD

**1. INITIATIVE** is the inner ability to take charge of a task, project, or event. It is the capacity to begin tasks without requiring the coaxing of another person. **LEADERSHIP** is a by-product of initiative.

**2.** A person with a developed sense of initiative assumes personal responsibility and is energized by a challenge rather than paralyzed by the fear of making a mistake.

**3.** Initiative begins during the preschool years as children invent games, devise rules, explore, creatively occupy themselves, and interact with others. Occasional setbacks happen to everyone. Such experiences can turn positive if they teach how to fine-tune initiative skills. If most occasions of self-starting have positive results, a sense of **DIRECTION** and **PURPOSE** take root within the child.

**4.** Model initiative skills:

- Promote exposure to varied experiences.
- Provide materials, tools, and resources that support varied interests.
- Answer questions patiently and respectfully.
- Enforce natural consequences.
- Establish reasonable standards and deadlines.

■ Demonstrate freedom balanced with responsibility and the needs of the common good.

■ Intervene only when a child infringes on the rights of another or engages in behavior that could result in moral or mortal harm of self or others.

■ Model recovery after mistakes.

■ Create to-do lists. Check off completed tasks.

**5.** Cultivate a culture of initiative:

■ **Mentor versus Manage:** Let your child plan ideas for schoolwork, contests, and projects. Help them plan a timeline, but let the planning and accomplishment be theirs. Work together on challenging tasks; then coach, decreasing active presence; and finally let the child assume full responsibility.

■ **Value IDEAS and PROCESS more than PRODUCT.** Acknowledge when a child demonstrates creativity, ingenuity, timeliness, or forethought. Discuss the importance of time management, teamwork, and distribution of labor in a group project.

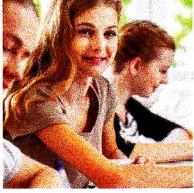
■ **Prepare your child to assume responsibility for school:** meeting deadlines; bringing lunch, supplies, and projects to school; returning school communications on time; and accepting

the consequences of action or inaction. Resist the temptation to bring your child's forgotten items to school.

■ **Instill Commitment:** By grade 5, if your child expresses interest in learning a new skill (such as piano, guitar, dance, or team sports), set expectations and encourage them to begin. Stress the importance of completion. If your child feels the need for a reduced activity load and chooses to quit an activity, discuss the best way the child can communicate the decision to those involved. **T**

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# OUTSIDE LOOKING IN

*Handling the hurt of being an outsider*

BY SR. PATRICIA M. MCCORMACK, IHM, EdD

**DURING A MIDDLE-SCHOOL ASSEMBLY**, a student asked if I'd ever experienced being on the outside looking in. He said that he was in that position and needed advice.

While I've never had the desire to be in a group that did not seem to welcome me, I have walked with many teens who carried the hurt of feeling like an outsider. These strategies can help.

- 1. It can feel intimidating to walk into a crowd.** Having someone to hang with gives a sense of security. However, be prepared to make yourself comfortable wherever you go. Carry a puzzle book or novel. Engage in an interesting activity. Then initiate conversation with the person next to you. (Respect people over things!)
- 2. Though comforting to belong to the "in group,"** it stunts your individuality when you take your identity from a group and let other people tell you how to think and what to do. Take opportunities to develop your personality as well as new interests or hobbies. Join outside-of-school activities. Speak to other students. Volunteer for tasks at school.

**3. Develop conversational skills.** Do not monopolize the moment. Instead, show interest in what other students are saying or doing. Ask someone to teach you a skill or to work with you on a fun project/task.

**4. At recess or lunch time, carry a deck of playing cards** (such as Uno, Crazy Eights, or Rummy) and invite other students to play. If balls are permitted, start a Four Square group. Become an entertainment initiator.

**5. Outside of school, invite one student at a time to join you for a leisure activity.** Observe how the other person reacts or responds to you. You'll learn what personality traits are attractive and what tendencies are counterproductive to friendship. (We all have both kinds.)

**6. Cultivate a PPEP personality:** Be positive, purposeful, enthusiastic, and proud!

**7. In order to have a friend, you must be a friend.** What qualities do you like to see in other people?

## Student Questions

- Why do teens hang around with groups that make them feel like outsiders?
- Why do you think teens let others tell them how to think and act? How do you think it could be stopped?
- Do you think if everyone lived PPEP that no one would be on the outside looking in? Explain.

Cultivate those qualities within yourself.

**8. Turn the hurt of exclusion into an opportunity** to develop skills that would not develop if you limited yourself to "in group" activities. **I**

*Send your questions and suggestions to SR. PAT at [DrPatMcCormack@aol.com](mailto:DrPatMcCormack@aol.com).*



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