



# Formative Parenting

*Cultivating Character in Children*

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

## AN ALPHABET OF PARENT PRESSURE POINTS

This NEWSLETTER presents digest-versions of some child behaviors that increase parent stress. Topics are organized alphabetically, A (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) through Z (Zzz's: Sleep Hygiene). Pressure points seem infinite. As a matter of fact, if you have Internet access you can find descriptions and advice on 117 typical misbehaviors of children at [www.disciplinehelp.com](http://www.disciplinehelp.com). Other helpful electronic sources include [www.parentsoup.com](http://www.parentsoup.com) and [www.kidshealth.org](http://www.kidshealth.org). May these insights ease your burdens and affirm your parenting style.

Whatever the child-initiated stressor, **Pipsic-R<sup>3</sup>** is a prescription for grace-filled relief.

<b>P</b>	<b>Proactive Measures:</b>	Eliminate or minimize predictable conflict by pre-thought and pre-planning.
<b>I</b>	<b>Intervene:</b>	Halt or call a stop to misbehavior. Diffuse hurtful actions and separate children where needed. Give eye contact and address the child by name. Be kind and calm, but firm. Speak few words, directly, using simple phrases or sentences. Let your voice tone convey expectation and clear objective rather than pleading, option, or negotiation.
<b>P</b>	<b>Pray:</b>	Promptly turn to God via a mantra like, "O God, come to my assistance. . ." or "Dear Jesus, tell me what to do . . ."
<b>S</b>	<b>Sift:</b>	Identify your personal ego issues and try to eliminate them from discussion of the child's behavior.
<b>I</b>	<b>Instruct:</b>	Make your tone respectful, not vindictive. Use the occasion to learn right from wrong, virtue, and the good.
<b>C</b>	<b>Consequences:</b>	Unless they are harmful morally or physically, let the natural or logical consequences of choices teach the lesson. Logical, imposed consequences are effective when they are related to the child's behavior, respectful of your own needs and those of the child, reasonable, and reliably enforced.
<b>R<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>Resolution:</b>	RESPONSIBILITY, RESTITUTION, and RECONCILIATION are essential to the process of resolving conflict if a child is to mature from the experience. Resolve an episode as quickly as possible and then let it go.

### **ADHD: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder**

ADHD is a complex condition that affects the behavior of three to seven percent of school-age children. The symptoms usually appear before age six: (1) **inattentiveness**: An inability to focus on things, i.e., difficulty paying attention, making careless mistakes, difficulty organizing tasks, not finishing tasks, not listening, being forgetful, being easily distracted; (2) **hyperactivity**: Having too much energy to handle, i.e., fidgeting, running or moving about when expected to be still, difficulty playing quietly, talking excessively; or (3) **impulsivity**: Acting without thinking, i.e., interrupting others, talking before thinking about the consequences, knocking over objects while running across a room. Many people occasionally demonstrate inattentiveness, hyperactivity, or impulsivity; but children who have ADHD exhibit these symptoms more often, as a pattern over time, and to a greater degree than other children of their age. Consult a doctor if the symptoms appear for more than six months and are negatively affecting relationships, schoolwork, or self-esteem. The symptoms may signal ADHD or they may be signs of other conditions, i.e., allergies, diabetes, anemia, neurological problems, stress, depression, anxiety, or learning disabilities.

Treatment includes medicine, environment changes, and behavior management. Medication may or may not be a life-giving solution. That topic is beyond the scope of this article and better left to the discernment of parents in consultation with a doctor. All children, particularly those with ADHD tendencies, benefit from an environment that increases security, i.e., structure, routine, system, procedures; clear boundaries and expectations reliably enforced; defined rules; respectful, related consequences and acknowledgement of both effort and achievement; encouragement; breaking a task into several steps; posting of chores; use of timer and alarm clock; adult predictability; elimination of distraction and noisy stimulation; goal setting that is practical, manageable and arranges for small successes; structured work space; and time out to cool down before confrontation. Time out equals one minute for each year of the child's life. Positive behavior develops best when a parent is proactive; plans to avoid predictable snags; is clear, directive, and respectful in communication; instructs during correction; and exacts accountability from the child. Diet and nutrition and adequate restful sleep, too, contribute to behavior management.

Suggested support resources include: ADHD: A Guide for Families, available, which may be downloaded at [www.ADHDLivingGuide.com](http://www.ADHDLivingGuide.com); [www.ADHDSupportCompany.com](http://www.ADHDSupportCompany.com); [www.add.org](http://www.add.org); and [www.ncld.org](http://www.ncld.org).

### **BULLYING: VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS**

A bully is a person who picks on or hurts another person repeatedly, either physically or through verbal threats, insults, and embarrassment or by systematically ignoring another person. Often bullies suffer from low self-esteem or are mistreated themselves and retaliate against innocent victims out of anger, frustration, or to win respect. All persons need to experience a sense of self-control, respect, and personal power. Anger gets displaced when children feel injustice or have no legitimate way of dealing with feelings of powerlessness. When parents foster growth in self-reliance, initiative, and industry their children grow in patience, self-control, respect, forgiveness and the ability to seek forgiveness and to make restitution. These practices and virtues are the antidote for bullying behavior. Victims are children that the bully views as smaller, weaker, or isolated. Some children are targeted because of their grades, looks, or achievement. If bullying is left unchecked it can result in a sense of fear, shame, hopelessness, violent reaction, loss of freedom, and even absence from school.

Advice for victims of bullying includes the following:

- Do not fight back. Focus on how to avoid violence.
- Don't trade insults.
- Avoid embarrassing the bully.
- Keep calm and act confident.
- Plan how to talk to the bully.
- Use humor to relax a tense situation, but be careful that the humor does not make fun of the bully.
- Agree with the bully. For instance, "You're right! Grades are important to me." Or, when a bully makes an accusation, apologize for the misunderstanding, i.e., "It was not my intention to hurt you. I apologize if it seemed that way to you."
- Compliment the bully with honest affirmation.
- Be assertive. Stand tall, make eye contact, address the bully by name, and state your position calmly and respectfully. Then walk away.
- Be proactive. Before trouble occurs practice (role-play) ways to respond to a bully.
- Get help. Speak with parents and principal, teacher, or counselor. Talk about your feelings. Develop ways to release tension and stress.
- Seek support resources like [www.scre.ac.uk/bully/](http://www.scre.ac.uk/bully/).

## CLIQUE

A clique is a small, exclusive group of people. If your child is a member of a clique, he or she experiences a sense of belonging, empowerment, and confidence. If your child is outside the clique he or she could feel inferior and inadequate. Being part of the "in group" is status. Being a member of the fringe is lonely. Children in both positions benefit from parent formation on topics like peer cruelty, resisting peer pressure, coping with rejection, and developing empathy so as to avoid isolating other children. Refer to the Parent Partnership Handbook article of April 2001 for a developed discussion of those topics.

If your child is hurting because of clique presence or activity, help him/her to handle the situation gracefully. Make efforts to strengthen self-esteem: Focus on positive abilities and attributes; be purposeful and set realistic goals; get involved in a hobby. Role-play ways to initiate small talk and to show interest in another's opinion. Discuss qualities of friendship-making: A smile, a friendly attitude, asking help, inviting another to join in an activity, being honest, polite, encouraging, reliable, loyal, respectful, and confidential. Develop communication skills: Conducive timing and location, eye contact, "I sentences", listening thoughtfully, not interrupting, asking questions, and summing up what was said. Refuse to gossip and use sound judgment about personal business.

## DANCES & DATING

Dances and dating are not wrong but they are unnecessary and counterproductive to the developmental growth of early adolescent children. Contemporary culture presents views of sex and relationships that distort social boundaries. Media canonize social scenarios that are out-of-step with the healthful emotional-social stage growth of children. How many pre-teens and early teens dress and walk and talk and act in ways that imitate TV soap opera stars or MTV musicians? It is not unusual for elementary-school-aged children to put pressure on parents to allow them to host or to attend boy-girl parties, dances, and sleepovers. Pressure builds and competition to be a popular parent tempts parents to give in or even to initiate such events. This is unfortunate for the child! Opposite-sex intimacy is one of several elements proper to the identity formation stage of adolescence (high school to age 25). Rather than sexual preoccupation, the focus of pre-adolescent and early adolescent development is, and needs to be, the strengthening of security, autonomy, initiative, industry, and the formation of friendships with persons of both sexes.

Early adolescence is a time for self-discovery and choices about appearance, developing skills, recognizing emotions, growing in confidence about one's own ideas, deciding what is of essence and importance, choosing and practicing values and convictions, and learning one's own likes and dislikes. At this time in their lives children most need to form strong bonds with persons of their own gender and they benefit most from single-sex and mixed-sex socialization that is general, inclusive, group-oriented, activity-focused, emotionally unpressured, and supervised. Parents can help their early adolescent children most by helping them to develop attractiveness in soul and personality and to discover the qualities needed for friendship and working relationships with both boys and girls, i.e., honesty, faithfulness, forgiveness, confidentiality, shared interests, common values, loyalty, reliability, humor.

## EFFORT & ENCOURAGEMENT, EXPECTATIONS, EXPLANATIONS, & EXCUSES

Effort is more important than results! Though A-average report cards and first-place trophies win smiles, if we look to results to validate our worthiness, we set ourselves up for failure. Often we have no control over results. Sometimes the interference or perceptions of others or natural circumstances either affect the outcome or judge the outcome as undesirable. Better that we learn to put our energy into what we can control, and that is our personal effort! Parent frustration is reduced and child security is increased when parents approach their children with that mindset and give them exercise in the kinds of skills that translate into effort such as time management, long-range planning, organization skills, attention to detail, breaking a large assignment into smaller tasks, goal setting, and learning to "plan your work and work your plan."

Encouragement is the key to growth in effort. Encouragement focuses on the assets and strengths of a child, promoting self-confidence, inner courage, and self-esteem. It is skill-related and comments on what a child can do instead of what he/she cannot do. Encouragement helps a child to find his own strengths and special qualities. It provides internal direction by naming a specific behavior that the child demonstrated and can repeat in the future if he chooses, i.e., "You showed foresight by going to the library right after receiving the assignment. I'm proud that you are developing initiative."

Expectations that are realistic, age-appropriate, and modeled by parents with consistency foster effort development in children. This is particularly true of desired character traits. If we want our children to put effort into moral growth, we need to illustrate by example and

nurture moral efforts through conversation, participation in action, books, and media. Book lists organized by age interest or by theme can be obtained from a reference librarian or by consulting websites like [www.bu.edu/education/com](http://www.bu.edu/education/com).

The term “explanation” is not a synonym for the word “excuse”! Encouragement of a child’s effort implies the willingness to elicit and to listen respectfully to a child’s explanation of attempts, obstacles, and failures. Use the explanation given by your child as a springboard to plan strategy for future incidents and to serve as a growing experience. Teach children that repair, restitution, accepting responsibility, and apology are part of the effort-result process. Help them to learn that neither good intentions nor accidents excuse (pardon) them from the responsibility of their efforts, choices, and results.

### FOOD CONCERNS

Fast food and body shapes seem to be national obsessions. It is estimated that 12 million children are overweight and 11% of high school students may have a diagnosable eating disorder such as anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, or compulsive overeating. Eating disorders develop from a combination of genetic, sociological, and psychological factors, including low self-esteem, depression, loss of control, feelings of worthlessness, family communication problems, identity concerns, and the inability to cope with emotions. Eating disorders are complex diseases that warrant professional medical and psychological advice. Electronic support includes [www.aacap.org](http://www.aacap.org) (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry); [www.anad.org](http://www.anad.org) (National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders) and [www.raderprograms.com](http://www.raderprograms.com) (Rader Programs).

Help your child to avoid problems with diets and eating disorders by developing healthy patterns of eating and exercise. Regulate meal times and snack times; serve balanced meals; create a “foods available shelf” in the refrigerator that stores cut-up vegetables, low-fat yogurt, fruit, or other healthful choices. Encourage walking, bike riding, and sports. Set a good example and talk with your child about her true beauty within or the talents and qualities that make him so attractive. Nutritionist Sue Gilbert recommends the book, *How to Get Your Kid to Eat... But Not Too Much* by Ellyn Satter.

### GOAL-SETTING

Industry is the ability to take a task to its completion. It is a fundamental element for growth in positive self-esteem. Goal-setting—the ability to set a reasonable target and to choose the appropriate means to achieve it along with a timely way to assess progress and refocus when necessary—is essential to growth in industry. Goals give children vision, focus, and exercise in filtering out the important from the unimportant. A child with life goals is more likely to withstand peer pressure and to say no to undesirable influences. Parents can eliminate much stress by helping their children to become goal-setters. The process is the same whether the end result is world peace or completing a homework project on time. Choose a target/focus/objective, write two or three steps necessary to achieve it, decide on the manner and timing for accountability checking, check on progress in periodic phases. Regroup and continue. Have goal-setting become standard operational procedure in your family, i.e., preparing the table for dinner, creating a 10-minute plan for household chores completion, packing for vacation, etc. Use goal-setting as an ongoing family topic around the dinner table. Structure an opportunity once a week for each family member to identify a personal goal and what steps they will take to accomplish it during the week. Midway through the week or at bedtime discuss the status of the goal. At the time of the next family discussion of goals, each member (including parents) report his or her progress and chooses direction for the week ahead. Some children need visual reminders, so a chart or contract may prove helpful.

### HOME ALONE

Personal safety and property security suggest that adult supervision be present whenever a child is in a house. Ideally, elementary school-aged children are rarely home alone and, on occasions where adult presence is not possible, proactive precautions are established, such as safety locks on doors and windows, refusal to answer the door or telephone, family code of telephone rings, emergency contact arrangements, no friends over, schedule/agenda of expected tasks, and an arrangement with a neighbor or nearby family member to check in at unscheduled times. Parents are advised to review behavior expectations and organize for success before leaving a child unattended. These kinds of precautions apply even to high school-aged children, especially if parents are away overnight. Respond to the accusation, “You don’t trust me!” with assurance that it is the culture that you do not trust! It is amazing how quickly word spreads that a particular house is sited for a party and, in the culture of today, too often that word has translated into destruction of property and substance abuse. Tell your children that

you have advised neighbors that if they ever suspect a problem, they are to call the police directly.

### **INTERNET SAFETY**

Progress has its price and this is true of advances in computer and telecommunication technology. Though the Internet provides exciting educational and cultural experiences, it also opens children to possible exploitation and harm through the misuse of e-mail and chat rooms. A Parent's Guide to Internet Safety, a free brochure available through your local FBI Field Office, offers parent support for the following issues: (1) What signs suggest that your child might be at risk on-line; (2) What you should do if you suspect that your child is communicating with a sexual predator on-line; and (3) What you can do to minimize the chances of an on-line exploiter's victimizing your child. To keep your child safe on-line use blocking software and/or parental controls available through your Internet service provider. Keep yourself up to date about necessary parent precautions with sites like [www.cyberangels.com](http://www.cyberangels.com); [www.getnetwise.com](http://www.getnetwise.com); [www.livewwwires.com](http://www.livewwwires.com); [www.safekids.com](http://www.safekids.com); [www.safeteens.com](http://www.safeteens.com) and [www.safesurfin.com](http://www.safesurfin.com). Most of all, communicate openly and honestly with your child, establish balanced time limits for Internet usage, walk over to the computer at unexpected times, and monitor his/her on-line activity.

### **JOBS AFTER SCHOOL**

Jobs outside the home can contribute to the development of initiative, industry, competence, self-confidence, maturity, and responsibility. Validation from folks other than family members goes a long way towards positive identity formation! Observing time schedules, keeping commitments, and organizing a life schedule to accommodate work time, school time, personal time, and family time are all good! And what child or parent will complain about having additional financial income, especially when the child is directed to exercise accountability for its use?

Something that seems too good to be true usually is! Therefore, a word of caution is timely. Work hours, work conditions, and emotional security need to figure into job consideration. Schooling and age-appropriate socialization is the primary vocation of children. A job that interferes with that or places unnecessary stress, physically or emotionally, it is not advisable. That said, many children handle a daily or semi-weekly job of one or two hours, such as shopping for a neighbor, lawn care, a paper route, or baby-sitting. Junior high students can probably give half a day on the weekend. Depending on schedules and extracurricular activities, high school youth may be able to

work a few hours during the week as well as weekends. The Gospel offers a measuring stick: "What does it matter for one to gain the whole world and lose himself in the process?"

### **KEYS TO THE CAR (AND OTHER PRIVILEGES)**

Use of the family car is a freedom and a privilege, not a right! Stewardship or accountability for proper use and respect for family needs go hand-in-hand with all privileges. Freedom without responsibility is license and it thwarts maturity. It contributes to a sense of entitlement and that is destructive. Formation toward adulthood suggests that adolescents who use the family car or who personally own a car (1) respect driving and curfew laws, (2) balance personal wants with family needs, and (3) accept responsibility for or contribute toward car insurance, upkeep, and gas. A misuse of privilege, accident, or police incident invite restitution and re-negotiation about future car use. Resist the temptation to rescue or cover for the mistakes of the child. Such parent actions may feel like love but, in reality, they enable irresponsibility and undermine growth in positive self-esteem. It is true of teenagers and it is true of six-year-olds.

Privilege is dictionary-defined as a special right or benefit. Privilege is not a requirement or necessity of life. Sometimes privilege is freely given and comes as a surprise. Such times are delightful because they are unexpected, unconditional, and maybe even unmerited. Privilege, in this sense, evokes a spirit of awe and appreciation within the child. Those responses are affective skills and they are components of the kind of emotional development that is necessary for conscience formation. At other times, and perhaps most times, privilege is earned and, when it is, it fosters a sense of autonomy, self-reliance, mastery, and accomplishment. These elements contribute to positive identity formation. The lack of them leads to feelings of inferiority, insecurity, or shame. For this reason it is helpful for a child to earn privileges.

Privilege as a standard diet ceases to be privilege and it takes on the flavor of entitlement. Entitlement, rescue expectancy, and "magic wand" thinking are harmful to growth in maturity, positive self-concept, and self-esteem, because they eliminate the need to develop industry and self-regulatory behavior. They foster, instead, "me, myself, and I" vision. Additionally, an air of entitlement poses a stumbling block to relationships and the affective skills of compassion, empathy, gratitude and self-sacrifice which bond one person to another.

## LEARNING DISABILITIES

The National Center for Learning Disabilities ([www.nclid.org](http://www.nclid.org)) defines learning disabilities as permanent neurological disorders of the central nervous system that interfere with a person's ability to store, process, or produce information, therefore creating a "gap" between one's ability and performance. Generally, individuals with learning disabilities are of average or above-average intelligence. With intervention, individuals can learn to compensate for learning disabilities and even to overcome areas of weakness, as did Hans Christian Andersen, Alexander Graham Bell, Cher, Agatha Christie, Whoopi Goldberg, Tom Cruise, Leonardo Da Vinci, Walt Disney, Albert Einstein, Thomas Edison, Suzanne Somers, Lindsay Wagner, and George Washington. The most commonly diagnosed learning disabilities include dyslexia (language processing), dysgraphia (writing, spelling, and organizing written composition), dyscalculia (math skills: memory of math facts, concepts of time and money), dyspraxia/apaxia (motor coordination of body movements), auditory discrimination (difficulty in recognizing speech sounds and sequencing sounds into meaningful words despite normal vision and hearing), visual perception (difficulty in noticing important details). The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry ([www.ascap.org](http://www.ascap.org)) reports that the most common indicators of learning disabilities are seen in a child who

- has difficulty understanding and following instructions.
- has trouble remembering what someone just told him/her.
- fails to master reading, spelling, writing, and/or math skills, and thus fails schoolwork.
- has difficulty distinguishing right from left; difficulty identifying words or a tendency to reverse letters and numbers, e.g., confusing 34 with 43; "b" with "d"; "on" with "no."
- lacks coordination in walking, sports, or small activities, i.e., holding a pencil, tying a shoelace.
- easily loses or misplaces homework, schoolbooks, or other items.
- cannot understand the concept of time; is confused by "yesterday," "today," "tomorrow."

If your child manifests warning signs consistently or problems persist over time, seek professional assessment. Begin with the classroom teacher; then consider testing and evaluation through your pediatrician or school psychologist. Counteract the possibility of poor self-esteem by giving your child perspective and an awareness of many successful adults who have learned to manage their learning difficulties and to compensate for weaknesses. Teach your child that a learning difficulty does not excuse a lack of effort.

## MEDIA CHOICES

"Communications media play a major role in information, cultural promotion, and formation . . . and the influence exercised on public opinion." (Catechism of the Catholic Church # 2493). In other words, input affects output. What goes into the mind of a child shapes perspective, attitude, and behavior. If you want your child to develop into a respectful person of virtue who seeks beauty and truth, you must strive for consistency in four goals: (1) Eliminate movies, TV shows, music, books, on-line activities, jokes, conversation, and entertainment that portray crudeness, vulgarity, disrespect, irreverence, sexual promiscuity, lying, manipulation, cheating, violence, etc. (2) Provide entertainment choices that are uplifting, ennobling, and respectful of persons and which offer life-giving messages. (3) Engage in ongoing communication and discussion with your children that explains the whys and why-nots of your media policy. (4) Monitor movies and music for content, values and attitudes expressed and implied. Sources like [www.screenit.com](http://www.screenit.com) review movies and "Plugged In" at [www.family.org](http://www.family.org) offer reviews of music. (5) Whenever you witness a life-blocking situation in media, take a stand. Express your disappointment, outrage, or disgust to your child and engage him/her in a critical analysis of the issue. This raises consciousness, which in turn contributes to conscience formation.

As with issues of physical safety, parents have the right and the duty to monitor, suggest, and restrict the kinds of movies and music that their children experience. Both have the potential to be life-giving or life-blocking. Too many "entertainment" projects portray themes of violence, irreverence, human indignities, promiscuous sex, sexual abuse, and sex without emotional bond and without commitment. At all times these are life-blocking messages but particularly since the dominant stage of moral development for most teens is one in which teens are highly impressionable; searching for identity; struggling with issues of differentiation and integration, obsessively concerned about the opinions of peers, approval, and acceptance; and focused on fad and fashion in designing their identities. Adolescence is a time for ideals and value formation. Since the culture does not foster positive growth within adolescents, parents and teachers must!

### "NO" IS A LOVE WORD

Limits and boundaries contribute to creating a sense of security, the primary element necessary for self-esteem. Unmonitored freedom and unlimited choices actually contribute to insecurity, confusion, and anxiety. Boundaries provide a safety net or wall against which a child can lean. Boundaries do not guarantee obedience,

but lack of boundaries will guarantee insecurity. Routine, procedure, system, and expectations, saying what you mean and meaning what you say, are all practices that foster security. As you strive to balance independence with control, base your authority on love. Say yes as often as possible but do not hesitate to say no when an occasion needs firmness. "No!" with a brief explanation is something that children can respect. The kind of explanation suggested states simple facts, probably voiced in three sentences or less. It is not coaxing or pleading.

We want to foster autonomy, responsibility, and independence. That implies the freedom to choose, to make mistakes, and to make restitution. When a child chooses behavior that is hurtful, disrespecting of others, or destructive, the child needs a parent to say "No!" If the negative choices of a child go unchallenged, the child develops socially unacceptable behavior and becomes annoying to others and disliked by both peers and adults. Permissiveness and giving in to or ignoring misbehavior hinder the development of empathy, self-control, sharing, caring about the feelings of others, and compassion. These skills are basic to conscience formation. Without them, children grow into persons who have a "me, myself, and I" attitude and easily disregard the rights and feelings of others. Correction that is kind but firm is the loving thing to do! Parent tips on a variety of discipline issues and character development can be obtained through sources like [www.essortment.com](http://www.essortment.com), [www.usoe.k12.ut.us](http://www.usoe.k12.ut.us), and [www.bu.edu/education/com](http://www.bu.edu/education/com).

### **ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS**

Awareness of and attention to detail come more naturally to some personalities than to others. Responsibility can be taught regardless. It has been said that if you fail to plan you are actually planning to fail. Though a bit extreme, this saying holds a kernel of truth that is worth exploring, especially as it relates to school achievement. Initially parents teach organization through very structured steps, for example: (1) Establish bedtime and wake up time that allow for morning routine, transportation to school, and lunch arrangements. (2) Designate a personal box or space where all school materials are stored, i.e., book bag, projects, gym clothes, permission slips, etc. (3) Preview the known schedule for the day. Make written reminder notes if necessary. (4) Insist that your child maintain a homework assignment log/book to track school requirements. Establish clear guidelines regarding its maintenance. If your child shows a pattern of neglect, require him/her to obtain teacher signatures for the day's assignments. (5) Label books and folders/portfolios for each subject. (6) Determine a place for homework that is free from the distraction of TV, telephone, e-mail, electronic games, refrigerator, etc. (7) Schedule a time for

homework. If your child has no assigned homework, devote the allotted time for review, reading ahead, or working on a long-range project. (8) Examine the homework log against the completed assignments. (9) Regularly supervise the cleaning out of folders and book bag. (10) Track long-range assignments on a calendar. Use to-do lists and Post-it notes for emphasis or prioritizing. (11) Schedule time limits for "free choice time" such as limited TV, video games, and social use of the Internet. (12) Be firm about bedtime. (13) Provide parental supervision daily and weekly until the process becomes second nature! Remember that it takes 21-30 days of repetition before an action is likely to become a habit. Resist the temptation to let up after the first day of success!

### **PARTIES & PRIVACY**

Party concerns of children in primary school, middle school, junior high and high school differ in some ways and are similar in others. A pressure point for elementary age parties is the hurt caused when some students are invited and others are excluded. Party invitations ought never to be distributed in school or in front of a child who is not included. Teach children to be sensitive to the feelings of others. Middle school parties might feed into cliques. Therefore, hosting class parties or "open" parties sponsored by several parents is a workable solution. Junior high school girls are often more interested in boys than the reverse, and both are nervous about making the right connections. To relieve self-consciousness and discomfort, plan parties with activities like bowling, skating, a picnic, or sports or with planned activities that engage each child such as board games, card games, charades, or *Pictionary*. Give a focus for the fun that eases social discomfort. High school parties all too often include the threat of sex or substance abuse. Despite teenage protest, know where your child is going, with whom, to what, and pre-arrange a policy for emergency pickup. Be observant when your child returns home.

General advice for all ages includes the following ideas: "Plan your work and work your plan." Pre-decide varied activities. Be present enough to know what dynamics are occurring. Your unscheduled appearances ward off many problems. Prepare your child to explain at the start of the party that the house rules include respect for persons and property, acknowledging accidents, and cleaning up before leaving. Welcome communication from parents and feel free to telephone the host parent to request information. If a child acts up, face him/her privately. Speak your expectations kindly but firmly. Do not be the source of harm by providing unsupervised sleepovers or hotel rooms, videos with objectionable content, alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs.

Privacy is an issue that is sometimes taken to the extreme. Parents have every right and even a responsibility to oversee the activities and relationships of their children. Maintain a presence when children are visiting in your home. Keep bedroom and recreation room doors open when visitors are in the house. Talk with your child about information you overhear during a carpool ride or when you walk by the telephone while a conversation is in process. It is a parent's prerogative and duty to ward off danger and to keep watch against potential threats. If your child gives you reason to second guess his or her activities, you must become vigilant and proactive. Be alert to the smell of alcohol and cigarettes and to the body language of your child when he/she returns home. Make eye contact. Enter into conversation. Being overly suspicious and hounding a child is the opposite extreme of a "hands off" policy. Between the two positions is the responsible parent for whom no room is off limits.

### **QUESTIONS**

"Why?" "How come?" "When?" "What if?" are some sentence starters that that can be pressure points for parents. Inquisitiveness is characteristic of initiative, an essential element for positive identity growth. Consequently, we want to encourage children to wonder, explore, test, ask, hypothesize, and question. Questioning is a form of risk-taking. Our manner of responding to questions either fosters or threatens initiative development. If, as a pattern, initiating efforts are put down, dismissed as irrelevant, ignored, or made fun of, a child will cease to ask questions and self-doubt will replace initiative. Treat questions and the questioner respectfully. Respond as simply as possible. Replace feelings of inadequacy with something like, "That's an interesting question. We'll learn the answer together." Anticipate time-pressured occasions and establish a question bowl where questions are written on slips of paper and deposited, a clipboard or chalkboard/whiteboard to list the question for future discussion, or a posterboard that collects questions written on Post-it notes. Be creative in determining a strategy for your family. The rule of thumb is that no question is stupid, that all inquiry deserves consideration, that parent time pressures and personal boundaries need to be honored, and that your child is worthy of your attention.

### **RESPONSIBILITY/ACCOUNTABILITY DURING ADVERSITY**

To be accountable means to be answerable for one's choices or actions and the results, whether intentional or accidental. "I didn't mean to hurt" is an explanation, not an excuse. Character forms when a child accepts responsibility for his contribution to a situation rather than

justifying himself, passing the blame, or shifting focus when confronted.

Accountability links cause and effect like two sides of a coin.

Adversity comes in all sizes and shapes. It can range from a broken lamp, a school fight, a disrespectful remark to a teacher, a failure on a test, and hurtful words to destruction of property, cheating, drug use, or criminal activity. Life-blocking behaviors, whether they are minor family matters or matters of public record, become catalysts of growth and character when children are formed in accountability. There is wisdom in the saying "Not everything faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced." Facing faults, limitations, destructive tendencies, and negative patterns is the first step in improvement. The next step is to identify alternative behavior responses or positive options for the future. Finally, the child needs to offer apology and make restitution. Restoring relationship and trust is crucial to positive growth.

Convert crisis into opportunity by teaching children to own up to their actions and to repair any damage caused by their choices. Character development and self-esteem are damaged when adults rescue a child from the consequences, cover up for a child, or assume responsibility and restitution in place of the child. The responsibility for correction is an element of the parenting vocation. When correction is necessary:

- separate the child from the behavior,
- speak respectfully and calmly,
- express confidence in the child's ability to be a problem-solver, and
- exact accountability.

For instance, "Chrissy, I love you and I enjoy your sense of humor; but what you said to Jack was hurtful, and you will need to find a way to make restitution. Think about it and then tell me how you intend to handle it." Effective correction is instructive, respectful, and validating.

During instances of adversity at school, parents are well-advised to resist the temptation to speak negatively about the school or a teacher in front of their child. There are always two or more sides to a story, and perceptions vary. Prudence suggests that a parent seek out the whole story before reaching a conclusion. Give a respectful hearing to the child's experience, ask clarifying questions, restate or summarize what the child said, validate the child's feelings, and express loving concern. Brash criticism of the teacher, principal, school, or rules becomes harmful for



the child. Helpful parent counseling sounds something like this: "I can see why you are hurt by what Mr. Jones said. That feels unkind. Pray for him and make sure that you never act like that with anyone. And since Mr. Jones dislikes that kind of activity, try to eliminate it from your behavior in his classroom. You can learn self-management from this hurt." Harmful parent reaction sounds something like this: "That teacher is a disgrace to the school. He finds someone in each class to pick on and this time it's you. I'm going to speak to the principal. He ought to be fired. Tell me if he speaks like that again to you or any other student." This kind of reaction is harmful to the child because it gives him or her covert permission to disregard the teacher, to become hardened of heart, and possibly to stir up negativity that colors the entire class atmosphere. The child's growth is best served by helping the child to assume personal responsibility where it applies, giving the child appropriate ways to approach the future, and speaking in private to the teacher. Respectful intervention is a Gospel value. It is never an attack or public reprimand; nor is it the topic of gossip in the schoolyard, food market, or school sports event.

### **SPIRITUALITY IN THE HOME**

Psychologist Carl Jung once said, "Bidden or unbidden, God is present." Belief in the all-present existence of God leads to the development of personal spiritual character. Spirituality or spirit mentality is the quality, manner, or mode of responding to our experience of God in each concrete circumstance of personal life: in relationships, duties, choices of leisure, books we read, movies we watch, etc. Spirituality embraces every facet of our living and colors our responses to every stimulus.

Parent spirituality provides children with a spiritual heritage more valuable than financial inheritance. Parent character affects the spirituality of offspring and influences future generations. Some parents foster spiritual inheritance in the following kinds of practices:

- Punctuate each day with formal prayer, i.e., wake-up prayer, blessing of meals, a God-centered ritual for bedtime, and prayer at the sound of emergency sirens.
- Celebrate the spiritual element of birthdays, patron saint's days, and holidays.
- Sprinkle conversation with spiritual advice, such as "God will provide," "All things are passing," "Ask Jesus to teach you how to forgive Brian," or "What would Jesus do?"
- Create a spiritual environment with crucifixes in major rooms; liturgical table decoration for Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost; religious statues and symbols; and a family slogan placed above the entry door, such as the words of Joshua 24:15: "As for me and my house we will serve the Lord."

- Name, define, and model virtues that you prize: integrity, respect for differences, hospitality, inclusion, etc.
- Read to your child books that promote virtuous living. Set a spiritual example in casual ways. For instance, "When I was praying last night . . ." or "I have to pray about that before I can give you an answer" or "Get back to me after you take time to pray about this."

### **TRUTH & TRUST**

Truth and trust are the foundation of relationship because we need to believe in each other, rely on each other, and grow together in loving, satisfying relationships in order to develop in positive ways. Archbishop Fulton Sheen once remarked, "It is easier to create faith than to restore it." Teaching that attitude and reducing the fear factor are effective tools to shape the value of honesty within a child.

Suggestions to decrease the fear factor include:

- Use moderate, logical, non-emotional consequences for misbehavior. Emotional, overly severe responses add to child nervousness. Lying then becomes a protective mechanism.
- When the truth is obvious, do not question about the incident. Lying then becomes a defense mechanism. Speak in few words with a calm voice. Convey through your face and body language that your love remains and that you are both going to take the incident in stride.
- Show respect for truthfulness. Express admiration when your child has the courage to be truthful. Sometimes reward immediate truthfulness by sparing the consequence.
- Consider the correction of lying as a valuable opportunity to teach a lesson about moral behavior, restitution of relationship, and responsibility.
- Use TV shows, movies, cartoons, and real-life situations that illustrate the effects of dishonesty and how lying can become a vicious cycle.
- Own up to your own mistakes. Be an example of directness and honesty. Lying, cheating, and exaggerating, all ways of misrepresenting the truth, was the subject of Parent Partnership Handbook, October 2000. A re-read of that newsletter will provide proactive suggestions that promote truth and trust.

### **UNIQUENESS**

**(and the other side of the coin)!**

Each of us is a unique expression of the image of God. No two of us are the same, not even identical twins. We are individually unique, precious, valuable, and unrepeatable gifts of God. We possess a one-of-a-kind mix of talents,

interests, personality, temperament, preferences, abilities, and infinite potential. A with all presents, the wrapping is only the surface, e.g., body build, coloring, eyes, hair. The gift is inside the wrapping; and it needs care, encouragement, and validation to grow into the person that God made each of us to be. Children need help to recognize and develop their uniqueness.

The other side of the coin, however, must be considered during the ongoing process of formation. While learning to love and celebrate herself, a child needs to balance her own uniqueness with the needs and uniqueness of others. "That's the way I am" is an explanation of me; it is not an excuse to inflict my preferences on others or to ignore their rights and needs. Ideally, self-knowledge leads us to better understand, communicate with, and appreciate others. Our personal preferences are not always appropriate to every situation. Our natural and automatic response is not necessarily the best. JOY results from the blend of Jesus, Others, Yourself.

### VALUES & VIRTUES

Values are ideals or principles that give direction to a person's life and choices. Children with good values lead lives that are positive, purposeful, enthusiastic, and proud. Life without values yields aimless, purposeless behavior that creates feelings of insecurity, inferiority, and apathy. Without a value code children become flighty, uncertain, inconsistent, overly conforming, chronic complainers, or role-players who try to impress others by assuming a manner, sentiment or position other than their own. Children without values are children at risk. Virtues are habits or tendencies that help you to do what is morally good. Virtues are God-given graces that develop only through practice and, when developed, provide a spiritual backbone for positive living. Both values and virtues develop through a three-step process:

1. Free choice after considering alternatives with their pros, cons, and consequences;
2. Prizing the choice even if it causes pain; and
3. Acting with repetition and consistency, so that the tendency becomes a personality characteristic.

Values and virtues are taught and caught through consistency, intentionality, perseverance, and emotional responsiveness. Introduce relevant vocabulary words to your child, such as respect, courage, persistence, tolerance, and prudence. Define them with examples that your child understands. Have your child think of personal examples. Identify the concepts when you see them in action in a TV show, on the playground, etc. Challenge each member of the family to put the concepts into action

during the week and to report on the specific situations and outcomes at dinnertime. Model the values or virtues yourself with consistency. Remember the caution of Ralph Waldo Emerson: "What you do speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what you say."

### WILLFULNESS

Willfulness! Is it a plus or a minus? The answer to that is probably found in degree. Henry Ward Beecher suggested: "That energy which makes a child hard to manage is the energy which afterwards makes him a manager of life." On the positive side are strong will, conviction, determination, self-reliance, and independence. They are characteristics of autonomy, a foundational element for positive identity formation and the antidote for problems associated with peer pressure. We want to encourage respectful assertiveness and responsible independence. On the other side, however, and the cause of parent stress, is the child who is unreasonably obstinate, headstrong, stubborn, purposefully contrary, adamant, immovable, inflexible, uncompromising, ungovernable, or unyielding. What to do?

1. Increase opportunities for leadership, choice, and legitimate control.
2. Reduce situations of frustration and inadequacy.
3. Speak clear, simple expectations kindly but firmly and with consistency.
4. Set reasonable goals.
5. Deal in logical consequences that are related to the matter, respectful, reasonable, and reliably enforced.
6. Illustrate cause and effect before the child makes a choice, i.e., "You may choose not to eat lunch but there will be no other food until supper."
7. When correcting, express positive before negative, i.e., "You are usually respectful to others. What made you say those mean things to Robert today?"

### X-TRA CREDIT

Extra credit opportunities contribute to the development of initiative and autonomy, both foundational elements for positive identity formation. Repeated instances of freedom with accountability, choice, cause and effect, and personal control of consequences assist a child to grow as a self-starter. Extra credit is one such exercise. Be clear, however, that the term extra credit must be interpreted literally in order to have a positive effect. Extra implies that the original or basic requirement has already been met and this new effort is not a substitute but an additional effort beyond the norm. Some children have the mistaken idea that extra credit activities ought to override previous failure to submit required assignments. It is

unfortunate for the student if some teachers allow this interpretation because it enables the continuance of magical thinking, irresponsibility, and poor study habits. The end result of a pattern of enabling is an underdeveloped sense of initiative and that is a handicap to positive self-esteem.

### YES TO COMMITMENT

Commitment is the ability to pledge yourself to another person or to a position or issue and to be faithful in keeping that pledge. The capacity for commitment does not develop overnight. It is a virtue that builds on industry, one of the essential elements of positive identity formation, an element whose primary time for development is the elementary school years. Industry is a sense of the importance of following through and finishing what you start. Industry is the capacity to be persistent and diligent, even when it becomes inconvenient, e.g., attending practices and games throughout a season even when the season is spent on the bench. Children who develop industry are able to create a systematic approach to problem-solving and responsibilities. Children who fail to develop industry deal with feelings of inferiority, inadequacy, or uselessness.

What can a parent do to help a child to develop industry, the capacity for commitment? Provide support and practice in the following characteristics: steady care over time, productivity, accomplishment (however small),

meeting deadlines, long-range projects, time management, organizational skills, and goal-setting.

### ZZZS (SLEEP HYGIENE)

Insufficient sleep can cause irritability; angry outbursts; hyperactivity; poor performance in school, sports, and games; listlessness; and physical and social problems. Sleep feeds the brain; insufficient sleep drains brainpower. Sleep needs may vary among individual children but generally, in order to function healthfully, preschoolers need at least 10 to 12 hours of sleep each night; elementary school children benefit from 9 to 10 hours; and most adolescents need between 8 to 9 hours. The National Sleep Foundation reports that "signs of sleep deprivation include difficulty waking in the morning, irritability late in the day, falling asleep spontaneously during quiet times of the day, and sleeping for extra-long periods on the weekends. In addition, sleepiness can also look similar to attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)." Helpful pointers are available for parents and teens at their website: [www.sleepfoundation.org](http://www.sleepfoundation.org).

If bedtime is torture in your house, try the following ideas: Avoid caffeine and high-sugar products after lunch time, provide transition time and wind-down activity, keep a routine, eliminate distractions, and provide dim lighting and soothing sounds near bedtime. Be consistent. Hold your ground kindly but firmly, and let nature take its course.

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