



Formative Parenting

Cultivating Character in Children

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

Guide to Whole Person Development – PART 3 THE EMOTIONAL-AFFECTIVE SELF

How we feel about ourselves shapes how we perceive and respond to other people, events, and situations. Self-concept affects relationships, and it aids or hinders both interactions with others and personal peace. For instance, can you think of an occasion when you spoke to another person who did not acknowledge you? If you were in “good space,” you took no offense. If, however, you were feeling poorly about yourself, you felt hurt, angry, humiliated, or indignant. The difference was not in the event but in your evaluation of yourself. Self-esteem, like happiness, is a by-product or result of choices, behaviors, and consequences. Emotional maturity or psychosocial development grows in ages, through stages, and it is affected by parenting practices, home environment, and the influences of other significant people and situations.

HOW DOES THE EMOTIONAL-AFFECTIVE SELF DEVELOP?

Erik Erikson (1902-1994) believed that people develop psycho-social skills in a predetermined order. He focused on the interaction of physical growth, psychological development, and social relationships. He examined how people connect with their world and how that connection affects a person’s sense of self. Erikson proposed eight stages that occur between birth and death, following the **epigenetic principle** that *growth occurs according to a biological plan that allows each function to emerge systematically until the person becomes fully developed*. Each stage offers two possible outcomes. If the outcome is positive, the child transitions into the next stage and thinks well of himself/herself. The child who fails to complete a stage successfully experiences a reduced ability to negotiate further stages and more easily spirals into negative self-esteem. The good news is that it is never too late to remedy the situation. The stages include: **trust vs. mistrust** (birth-18 months); **autonomy vs. shame, self-doubt** (18 months-3); **initiative vs. guilt** (3-6); **industry vs. inferiority** (6-12); **identity vs. role confusion** (adolescence); **intimacy vs. isolation** (young adulthood); **generativity vs. stagnation** (middle adulthood); **ego integrity vs. despair** (old age). Healthy personality develops through experiences, choices, and practices that produce a pattern of positive outcomes.

While it is true that at each life stage the focus is on a particular psychological conflict, the tension is never experienced in isolation. At every age and at every stage people need to continually cultivate the positive resolution of previous life stages. For example, consider **identity formation, the stage five task**, developed during adolescence. Pre-requisite to developing identity is the positive resolution of stages 1-4: trust, autonomy, initiative, and industry. Identity formation is the most serious crisis a person faces during development. A person with well-formed identity is comfortable with who he is, does not try to be like others, and recognizes his pluses and minuses. She chooses what qualities of others and environments are most beneficial for self growth, knows what psychological defenses are most appropriate for her in the face of threat and anxiety, and has a sense of being at home with herself. People with positive identity can function in a variety of roles that bring consistent reactions from different people, and they learn what instincts, needs, and roles are most valuable to their well-being. A person without a well-formed identity will encounter one problem after another during adult life.

The remainder of this newsletter presents mini-descriptions of Erikson’s stages 1-5 along with parenting suggestions. May this digest report on psychosocial development support your efforts in the whole-person development of your child.

STAGE 1: INFANT (BIRTH-18 MONTHS)

Positive resolution of Trust vs. Mistrust/Withdrawal develops a sense of drive and the quality of hope. Security is the sense of trust, emotional safety, and confidence that the child's needs will receive predictable responses from significant people. With this assurance, energies are available to deal with unpredictable stresses.

Advice: Provide routine, procedure, and system. Organize the environment. Initiate safety precautions, both physical and emotional. Practice attentiveness, inclusion, consistency, continuity, and predictability. Keep promises. Anticipate needs and schedules. Say what you mean and mean what you say! No double standards.

STAGE 2: TODDLER (18 MONTHS-3 YEARS)

Positive resolution of Autonomy vs. Shame/Doubt/Compulsion develops a sense of self-control and the quality of willpower. Autonomy is the sense of respectful independence, inner authority, responsibility, and self-reliance that permits a child to make appropriate decisions without the need of supervision.

Advice: Arrange for age-appropriate charges, responsibilities, and tasks. Prioritize assignments. Practice prudent supervision, not intrusion. Give encouragement rather than empty praise. Provide for limited choices and responsible independence. Teach and model respectful assertiveness and self-control. Expect accountability for choices and consequences. Demonstrate that you value effort more than results. Do not assume responsibility for tasks that your child is capable of accomplishing independently.

STAGE 3: PRE-SCHOOL PLAY AGE (3-6 YEARS)

Positive resolution of Initiative vs. Guilt/Inhibition develops a sense of direction and the quality of purpose. Initiative is the motivation to originate plans and the capacity to conquer tasks as a self-starter without requiring the coaxing of another person.

Advice: Expose children to varied experiences so that they find personal strengths, weaknesses, preferences, and abilities. Provide materials/tools/resources that support varied interests and expectations. Give patient, respectful answers to questions. Establish reasonable standards and deadlines. Use natural or logical consequences as teaching tools, not punishment or rewards. Demonstrate freedom balanced with responsibility and contribution to the common good. Encourage prudent risk-taking. Intervene only when your child infringes on the rights of others or when bodily or moral harm is threatened. Model how to recover after making a mistake. Demonstrate that you value ideas and process more than product.

STAGE 4: ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (6-12 YEARS)

Positive resolution of Industry vs. Inferiority/Inertia develops a sense of method and the quality of competence. Industry is the capacity to be persistent and diligent, to follow-through on a task, and to create a systematic approach for problem-solving and accomplishing responsibilities. If we do not contribute to growth in industry, we are contributing to the development of inferiority!

Advice: Provide repeated, systematic instruction in the world of tools (i.e. appliances, computer, screwdriver) and skills (i.e. cooking, cleaning, reading, summarizing, study skills). Engage child in tasks that require steady care over time, productivity, and accomplishment. Cultivate deadlines, completed tasks, time management, and organizational skills. Create long-range projects with periodic check-in points. Work side-by-side on a difficult task. Model and teach how to set a goal, name specific parts/objectives, determine reasonable time line and periodic means of evaluation; re-structure when necessary.

STAGE 5: ADOLESCENCE (AGES 13-22)

Positive resolution of Identity vs. Role Confusion/Isolation develops a sense of devotion and the quality of fidelity. Identity is who I think I am at my deepest core. (Objectively we are precious, unrepeatable gifts of God made in God's image. But subjectively we are capable of thinking of ourselves in negative terms. Thinking affects acting!) Identity is the integration of life experiences into a unity and persistence in personality; it gives the person a basic confidence of inner continuity/sameness even in the midst of confusion or change.

Advice: Identity tasks include: (1) setting and achieving goals, (2) facing the challenges of the adult community, (3) mature relations with age mates of both sexes, (4) emotional independence of parents and adults, (5) accepting personal appearance, and (6) recognizing personal worth and competence. Present reflection opportunities to trace personality/character choices in several instances and to recognize patterns. Encourage short-term goals and organize to aid follow-through behaviors. Demonstrate recognition of personal worth and contribution. Expect accountable participation and contribution to family, teams, groups, friends, and responsibilities. Support occupational choices and efforts to clarify sex role. Be sensitive and helpful to adolescent's desire to accept/improve personal appearance.

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