



Formative Parenting

Cultivating Character in Children

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

Weaving the Fabric of Christian Character, Part 4 **WEAVE THE "WEFT" ON THE LOOM OF CHRISTIAN CHARACTER** **Parent Practices for Developing Critical Thinking Skills in Children**

Dear Parent,

Soul formation is an intentional process that resembles the weaving of fabric. Parents are the primary weavers of Christian character within their children. Beginning at birth, parents provide the structure and the framework for the loom of soul formation by establishing and maintaining a family environment of security and consistency. Upon the loom parents place the initial lengthwise threads (warp) of affectivity, that is, the inner desire for goodness and truth and an internalization of emotional skills like empathy. Affectivity develops during parent-child interactions that guide a child to name, claim, and tame emotions that makes possible future growth in values, ideals, empathy, sympathy and compassion. Affectivity, or the warp on the loom of soul formation, is the first of three dimensions of Christian character and conscience development. The process and guidelines for developing positive emotional affectivity in children was discussed in a previous Parent Partnership Handbook article entitled: *Parent Strategies for Developing Affective Skills in Children of Elementary School Age*.

Consider now the horizontal threads that interlace with the lengthwise warp threads to form a fabric. The horizontal threads are called the **WEFT or WOOF**. The focus of this letter is to compare the WEFT with REASONING, the second dimension of Christian character formation.

Reasoning requires the ability to move from concrete, verifiable thought to abstract thought; the ability to gather isolated facts that are related to each other; and the ability to make decisions on an objective, non-emotional basis. For the Christian soul the weft-reasoning includes the teachings and example of Jesus Christ as an objective criterion for decision making. In the **first dimension of character formation (the warp skills)**, children focus on the concept of "good and bad" and base their judgments on the intentions of the person acting. In the **second dimension of conscience development (the weft skills)** the focus is on "right and wrong" based on objective criterion in each specific instance of acting.

The ability to reason is developmental in that it matures in stages but it is never too early to provide exercises for your child that require thinking, collecting information, recalling from memory, and making observations on persons and events that fill the world of your child. Experiences that teach or improve perception (immediate, intuitive recognition), memory, reasoning, evidence gathering, and problem solving contribute to the development of comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation that are needed to form objectively right judgments. **These functions are also called cognitive skills or critical thinking skills.** Sources of practice for developing critical thinking skills are as close as the remote control for the family television where you can engage your child in comparing and contrasting traits and decisions of characters in a cartoon; and as inexpensive as a walk in a park or a drive through a parking lot where you can make observations, generalizations, and predictions. Use the world of your child to develop reasoning abilities that represent Gospel values and to identify situations that lack the values of Jesus.

On the reverse side of this letter are parent strategies for developing reasoning skills in children of elementary school age. May the information shared in this letter affirm your parenting style and serve as a guide to determine how best to provide for the Christian Character development of your child.

**Parent Strategies for Developing Critical Thinking Skills
in Children of Elementary School Age
(Christian Character: Dimension 2)**

Adapted from: Himes, K.R. (1992). "Conscience Formation and Moral Decisions" in *Sharing the Faith*, Volume 2. Washington: National Catholic Educational Association, pp. 145-159.

Dimension 2 of Christian Character development parallels the development of Conscience Level 2. At this stage of development conscience is experienced as the ability to make wise decisions. Parents sharpen the ability of their child to make sound, moral judgments that are correct by providing practice of thought processes that go beyond recall and comprehension exercises to include regular opportunities for their child to use application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation skills. In addition to reasoning ability, children need guidance in developing decision-making skills, personal responsibility, and personal accountability in order to develop Christian Character. In order for young people to use their God-given freedom well, parents need to help their children develop a process of decision making that recognizes the need to study, seek information, and gain insight from others. Such a process followed consciously and prudently will permit the discernment of God's will to happen.

LEVEL OF CRITICAL THINKING SKILL	DEFINITION THE SKILL	HOW TO DEVELOP THE SKILL
Level 1: KNOWLEDGE	The ability to recall; to bring to mind appropriate information; to recognize information, ideas, and principles learned previously	Provide opportunities for your child to define, repeat, list, memorize, name, label, record, recall, relate, tell, report, and narrate.
Level 2: COMPREHENSION	The ability to translate or interpret what is communicated and to change the information into a different symbolic form or different words while retaining the meaning	Provide opportunities for your child to restate, describe, explain, identify, report, discuss, recognize, express, locate, paraphrase, estimate, and review.
Level 3: APPLICATION	The ability to select, transfer and use data and principles to complete a task with a minimum of direction; to solve a problem using knowledge and appropriate generalizations; to use ideas, principles, theories in new situations	Provide opportunities for your child to demonstrate, practice, interview, apply, translate, dramatize, operate, schedule, illustrate, interpret, solve, and compute.
Level 4: ANALYSIS	The ability to separate or break down information into component parts; to be able to organize specific tasks within a given whole	Provide opportunities for your child to debate, distinguish, question, differentiate, solve, diagram, compare, inventory, criticize, experiment, outline, subdivide, and discriminate.
Level 5: SYNTHESIS	The ability to put together parts and elements into a unified organization or whole that requires original, creative thinking; to integrate or combine ideas into a product, plan or proposal that is new to the person	Provide opportunities for your child to compose, propose, formulate, assemble, construct, design, arrange, rearrange, organize, prepare, classify, catalog, plan, create, combine, add to, improve, and design.
Level 6: EVALUATION	The ability to judge the value of ideas, procedures, or methods according to standards; to appraise, assess or criticize on the basis of standards and criteria -- not on personal opinion.	Provide opportunities for your child to select, judge, predict, choose, estimate, measure, value, rate, assess, evaluate, select, contrast, give supporting ideas, justify, debate, solve, and recommend.

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