



Formative Parenting

Cultivating Character in Children

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

Parent as Mentor, Part 4 **MENTOR PERSEVERENCE**

Does your child recognize the maxim, **“If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again!”** More importantly, is perseverance a component of your child’s character? For sure, it is exercise, practice, guidance and encouragement that teach perseverance, not words. But parents can use language to establish focus and teach values.

We teach character, much the same way as reading. We expose children to language, like “perseverance.” We define the word. We use the term in context. We refer to it when we see an example in real life, on TV, or in reading material. We use the term with an example when we speak encouragement. For instance, “You earned that grade because of the quality of your work, Laurie. You earned my admiration because you persevered through several trials to finish what you set as your goal.” Advertising the values that you want your children to hone is essential to character development. Thoughtful slogans or mantras, spoken and used as decorations throughout the house, create a character environment. Sometimes quotations appear on the refrigerator or on the food table, on the bathroom mirror, above a staircase or door, or near a light switch. What areas of your home lend themselves to advertising character? What one-liners or quotations shaped your character? Are you sharing them with your children?

Mantra mentoring can emerge from various sources. St. Paul spoke of perseverance when he said, **“...Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character (virtue), and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us”** (Rm. 5: 3-4). We do not have to create scenarios for suffering. Suffering has a way of finding each of us. It is part of human nature to find ourselves as an object of disappointment, betrayal, being rash-judged or misunderstood, less valued than another or responsible for a mistake. Learning to bear with that sorrow, to turn it into a teachable moment, to resolve not to do to another a hurt that we feel has been done to us, to be informed but not defined by criticism, etc. These positive approaches build character. Help children to learn how to persevere through difficulties and to trust that life follows death to self.

Saints and athletic coaches offer similar advice about perseverance. St. Theresa of Avila taught, **“The only way to fail is to stop.”** Vince Lombardi, of Green Bay Packer fame, coached his team with mantras like, **“Winners never quit and quitters never win.”** All athletes surely agree with the thought, **“Rest if you must, but don’t you quit.”**

Poems, too, have the potential to shape attitudes and actions. For example, “Don’t Quit,” offers sound advice and yields several mantras or worthy aphorisms.

Don't Quit (unknown author)

When things go wrong as they sometimes will.
When the road you're trudging seems all uphill.
When the funds are low and the debts are high
And you want to smile, but you have to sigh.
When care is pressing you down a bit,
Rest, if you must, but don't you quit.

Life is odd with its twists and turns,
As everyone of us sometimes learns
And many a failure turns about
When you might have won had you stuck it out.
Don't give up though the pace seems slow.
You may succeed with another go!

Success is failure turned inside out –
The silver tint in the clouds of doubt,
And you never can tell how close you are,
It may be near when it seems so far.
So stick to the fight when you're hardest hit.
It's when things seem worst that you must not quit.

INDUSTRY – THE FRUIT OF PERSEVERANCE

Industry—the habit of finishing what you start—is a core element of positive self-esteem. Children develop a sense of industry, competence and confidence when, *as a pattern*, children:

- give steady care over time to tasks
- develop goal-setting skills
- meet deadlines
- finish long-range projects
- set realistic time expectations
- acquire organizational skills.

This process of growth implies perseverance and hanging in when things get tough or boring.

Celebrate the value of effort. Cultivate an attitude that prizes effort more than results because we do not always have control over the results of a project. Sometimes other elements sway results. If children define their self-worth by results only, or the opinion of another person, they are setting themselves up for failure. The only element that they truly have control over is their effort, their perseverance, their determination to do the best job they can with what they have available. If industry propels them, they will find satisfaction and peace regardless of the end product. Finally, parents, take comfort in the admonition of St. Luke: **“By your endurance you will gain your souls”** (Lk. 21:19).

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