



Formative Parenting

Cultivating Character in Children

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

Establishing a Foundation for Authentic Self-Esteem, Part 3 FOCUS ON AUTONOMY

A Parent's Guide to Identify • Establish • Develop • Maintain • Remediate a Child's Sense of Autonomy

Dear Parent,

Review the CHARACTERISTICS CHART below. Decide which characteristics, if any, describe your child under **usual**, **repeated** circumstances. The results will serve as a guide to determine how to best meet the Self-Esteem and Identity Formation needs of your child.

Characteristics of children who have a <u>basic</u> sense of AUTONOMY :	Characteristics of children who have a <u>basic</u> sense of SHAME & SELF-DOUBT :
<p>A CHILD WHO:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • usually assumes the freedom to be in charge of self without needing to be told what to do • is self-governing; does not need an adult present as a controller • uses personal freedom in a way that respects the rights of others • can stand up for self in a healthy, positive way; is assertive without being aggressive • practices self-control without feeling a loss of self-esteem • has a sense of appropriateness, dignity or gracefulness in new situations • knows personal limits (how far to go; when to stop) • can accept corrections or criticisms and benefit from them • is independent in a positive way that parents and adults respect • is a risk-taker in appropriate ways 	<p>A CHILD WHO:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • does not know personal limits and therefore does not know how far he or she can go in a situation • is afraid of testing personal limits • is generally afraid of making a mistake; he or she would rather do nothing than make a mistake • is painfully self-conscious • desires to be "invisible", to fade into the background • turns anger against self • is often angry with self • feels inappropriate or unacceptable • is sensitive to and conscious of personal short-comings • often has a sense of regret • often feels disapproval (censure) from others • often expects disapproval from others

The positive outcome of the ratio of **AUTONOMY vs. SHAME/DOUBT** produces
SELF-CONTROL as a basic life strength
and
WILLPOWER as a basic life virtue.

PARENT PRACTICES that support the growth of AUTONOMY are those which help a child to become:

responsibly independent

self governing

self controlled

respectfully assertive

accountable for choices & consequences

Do not do for a child a task that he/she is capable of doing independently.

Praise EFFORT more than RESULT.

Parent Practices That Support the Growth of AUTONOMY during Elementary School Years (K-8)

A sampling of suggestions offered by 93 Parents of “Successful” Children include but are not limited to the following parenting practices:

- Allow your child to do age appropriate things with minimal help, i.e., dress, get snacks, make bed, set dinner table, fix hair, what to have for breakfast, clean up from play activities, pack lunch and materials for school, use an alarm clock, school projects, etc. Once your child is able to do a task independently expect him/her to assume responsibility for continuing the task independently in the future.
- Let your child learn from and deal with any negative or disappointing aspects of his/her choices. Permit your child to experience the consequences of his/her choices. Adjust consequences to fit the infraction. Help him/her to learn from mistakes.
- Ask for your child’s opinion in problem solving. Respect his/her ideas. If your child needs help, then help out with the solution but do not solve the problem. Let your child solve his/her own problems , i.e., personal conflicts with siblings or friends, telephone calls to coaches, questions on projects, questioning grades with a teacher, car pools for leisure activity, accepting or canceling party invitations, negotiating with store manager over store-related situations, choosing birthday presents for friends and financing them, etc.
- Limit the amount of TV watching. Use the buzz word “resourceful”. Require your child to be resourceful and find something to do on his/her own like pick up a book to read, a puzzle to do, color from a variety of coloring books, create a lego design, make a greeting card for a grandparent, etc. Teach your child to structure his/her own time (mindful of household needs).
- Consider planning free time on occasion to provide time for your child to develop or discover his/her own talents and preferences. For example, kick the soccer ball, draw with mom, puzzles, legos, computer, board games, roller blading, etc. Other siblings can join in the activity but the main focus is on the one child who picked the activity.
- Have age appropriate “privileges” separate from siblings, i.e., bed time, TV viewing, etc. Also, establish age appropriate chores separate from siblings.
- Identify needs to be filled and permit your child to decide the order of completion. For example, explain that three tasks need to be done: raking leaves, cleaning the bedroom and picking up the house. Establish a time line for completion.
- Discuss feelings and emotions. Help your child to put situations of pain, fear, loss, anger, tears etc. in perspective. Honor that all feelings are acceptable, natural, and spontaneous. Teach your child the difference between feelings and behaviors. He/she has no control over feelings but has all control over behavior.
- Give sincere, specific praise for the effort or attempt that your child makes regardless of the product achieved. Express the positive even if the result is not perfect.
- Together determine do-able responsibilities for your child, i.e., load dishwasher, get the mail, carry in groceries, help the neighbors in a specific way, empty wastebaskets, make personal bed, put clothes in hamper, put toys away, etc. Monitor the performance, give support, and praise the effort and the job well done. (K-3): Job charts are helpful. (4-6): Add specialized tasks onto a weekly calendar. (7-8): Allow a week long deadline for completion. Pre-determine allowance for successful completion of chores and/or weekend privileges dependent upon completion.

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