



# Formative Parenting

*Cultivating Character in Children*

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

## **A Parent Guide for Middle School Years, PART 5 THE RELATIONAL 'TWEEN**

Dear 'Tween-ager,

'Tween time is an in-between time. You are no longer a child but you are not yet a high school teenager either. Middle school is a time of many changes. Your body is changing. Your brain is maturing to allow new ways of reasoning. Your emotions are confusing and you may even become moody. Your interests are expanding. Peer opinion, approval, and criticism cause pressure within you. Probably you are more sensitive or serious, and more self-conscious, reluctant and reticent than you were during grades K-6. Adults may even accuse you of being selfish or self-centered. Possibly you feel inferior to others, believing that just about everybody else is more capable than you or you realize that you have gifts and talents but you do not want to stick out in the crowd and so you are tempted to squash your uniqueness. Many 'twens are *altruistic*, meaning that they are very interested in making the world a better place and yet, these same 'twens can be cruel to an unpopular classmate.

Do you see yourself in any of this descriptive paragraph? Are you uncomfortable about the changes that you are going through? If so, have courage! Middle school years are a challenge for all 'twens. Some just hide it better! The good news is that this stage of life will pass.

Middle school is a time when relationships with peers of both genders is a focus of thought and anxiety. The truth is that relationships are essential to your well-being and so this newsletter focuses on *relational development*. The bottom line is that two healthy "I's" are necessary in order to have a healthy "WE." Only a healthy "I" is capable of a mature relationship.

### **DEVELOP RELATIONAL SKILLS**

Middle school is the time to discover and to develop the "I" while honing five specific relational skills:

1. **Develop your personality.** Young children and immature others live in a world of "Me, Myself, and I." That attitude does not win friends or cause teams/groups to seek your membership. Neither does negativity, a critical attitude, or a boring spirit attract people to you. Strive to be positive, purposeful, enthusiastic, and proud. Keep your promises.

Put effort and energy into everything that you do. Safeguard confidences. Avoid gossip. Dream what you want your personality to “look like” and then turn the dream-characteristics into goals.

2. **Identify your strengths and weaknesses.** Scripture says, “All fulfillment has its limits” (Ps. 119:96). Don’t waste energy by pining to be something other than what you are. Who you are and what talents you possess are a gift from God, and God does not make mistakes! Express support to others whose skills, interests, and accomplishments are different from yours and put the lion’s share of your energy into developing your plusses and compensating for what you perceive to be weaknesses. Foolish people miss out on their infinite potential by obsessing on the gifts of others.
3. **Build conversational skills.** Know what interests your audience. Learn about those topics or, at least, create a few sentence starters about those topics as well as general conversation starters. Carry your starter-thoughts in your “spiritual pocket” so that you can initiate conversation. Listen carefully so that you can repeat or refer back to topics in the future. Express admiration for or interest in what the other person is doing.
4. **Treat people as expressions of God.** All persons are precious gifts of God, made in God’s own image – “*Imago Dei*.” People are not objects to be used, misused, abused, or discarded.
5. **Learn to name, claim, and tame your emotions.** Hone the skill of giving a specific title to your feelings. Only then you will be able to own the reason for why you feel it, and to know how to handle the emotion in a healthy way now and how to tame it in the future. For example, to say that you are hurt or sad is a start, but it would be far more helpful if you named lonely, ignored, confused, insecure, suspicious, etc. Dr. Michele Borba provides a list of emotional vocabulary that may help you.  
<http://www.micheleborba.com/Pages/ArtBMI09.htm>.

Practice these five tips now and you will grow into a healthy, happy, well-formed adult ready for all the good things that can come your way.

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