

Character Development and Building Lasting Faith in Children

Parents want their children to learn to thrive, develop faith, and be happy, but often don't know how to meet their children's needs. As a mother of five I understand. When kids understand God loves them and sacrificed for them, it's easier to develop character traits like kindness and compassion.

It helps to focus on meeting our children's needs through parental actions. That helps produce desired outcomes. That's part of strength based intentional parenting.

As parents we want to be observant and intentionally identify and cultivate positive traits, qualities, and processes in our children. Studies indicate such a strategy improves a child's resilience and stress levels. Other studies show that positive parenting results in children with higher happiness, success, and morality levels.

Here are some basic needs of children and why they matter

- Attention-I am loved

From an infant who feel loved when held and cared for through the years, attention means investing time and focusing on the child when you're together. When you stoop down to their eyelevel, look a child in the eye, and listen to what he or she says, it shows you want to connect and invest time in his or her life.

- Acceptance- I belong

To accept a child means to value the child's unique personality, looks, and interests. Accepting a child for who he or she is helps the child feel secure and belongs, and doesn't compare your child to any other child.. Expressing joy in a child's individuality shows acceptance. We all want to belong to our family, church, or other group and be treasured for who we are as individuals. Express joy at meals and other times for your great and unique children. Praise their strengths.

- Affirmation-I have a purpose

When you provide opportunities for a child to serve and encourage them to follow their interests in positive ways, you are telling them they are valuable and have purpose. Follow up with words that say, "You did a great job."

- Assurance- I am safe

Providing assurance means to build trust in ways that lets the child know she or he are safe. The ultimate assurance is faith in God and knowing eternal safety. Trust begins when a child feels that he or she will be protected.

- Approval/respect-I matter

Noticing a child's actions and voicing approval for positive choices and deeds lets a child know he or she matters. Her actions are worthy of your praise. When a child helps, express thanks and state that he or she helped you. When a child uses her or his unique talents to help, such as a strong child carrying in groceries, or a child with a lovely voice singing a song to cheer you up, show approval.

- Affection-I am cherished

A hug, pat on the back, and a warm smile show affection. Words of affection from God loves you to you are my friend provide verbal affection. These actions and words help children feel cherished and loveable.

- Accountability—I am heading in the right direction

Children need guidance and rules to follow. It nurtures their growth and helps them mature. In holding them accountable from saying please and thank-you to following through on rules, they become responsible. It also helps them know they are making good choices. That's where discipline comes in to guide them to better choices when they make a poor choice. They need to learn what behavior is acceptable and what behavior hurts people and is not acceptable.

- Adaptability— I am flexible

Life isn't static and children who accept change and overcome obstacles realize they are flexible and can adapt. They will discover inner strength and become problem solvers. Add a twist to a game or activity to encourage adaptability. Encourage children to try something new in various areas from eating and movement to learning something new in faith and subjects.

- Attitude Assessment—I can forgive and find joy

Assessing a child's attitude helps adjust their heart condition. Children need to learn to identify their emotions to adjust their attitude. It's fine to express their feelings calmly and learn how to deal with negative emotions in a healthy way. Talking about attitudes opens the door to forgiveness and discovering ways to find joy despite circumstances.

- Adventure—I am courageous, creative, and I can succeed

Providing opportunities for children to be adventurous provides them with experiences that help them experiment, fail, and succeed. It allows them to be creative. It helps them look forward to the future. A child learns, "You believe in me and my ability."

The following excerpts are from [Secrets of Success for Women: the Home](#)

Connecting a child's personality to Jesus

For created my inmost being, you knit me together in my mother's womb. Psalm 139:13

A child's personality gives clues for spiritual training methods. Gary Smalley depicted personalities with animals though there are other terms used.

Playful otter (Popular/sanguine) This optimistic child loves to make friends, play, and talk.

NURTURE STRENGTHS

- ✧ Teach about a personal relationship with Jesus.
- ✧ Keep devotions fun with variety.
- ✧ Look for Bible fun (Esther's beauty contest, Peter fished).
- ✧ Buy a Bible with pictures and activities.
- ✧ Find fun church programs for them.

HELP THEM OVERCOME WEAKNESSES

- ✧ Encourage setting and follow goals.
- ✧ Encourage thinking before speaking.

Lion (Powerful/choleric) This natural born leader sets goals and likes directing activities.

NURTURE STRENGTHS

- ✧ Explain God's purpose and plan for salvation.
- ✧ Read Bible of leaders (Paul, David, Deborah).
- ✧ Let them choose devotion materials.
- ✧ Let them lead devotions.
- ✧ Buy a Bible and matching journal.

HELP THEM OVERCOME WEAKNESSES

- ✧ Promote consideration of others.
- ✧ Let children see leader's problems. (Moses, Paul)

Beaver (Perfect/melancholy) This organized child completes tasks, but may be pessimistic.

NURTURE STRENGTHS

- ✧ Teach God's truths and sense of justice and right.
- ✧ Be consistent with time and devotions.
- ✧ Teach Bible stories that show failure (Eden, flood).
- ✧ Explore truths of salvation and Jesus.
- ✧ Help child choose a study Bible.
- ✧ Encourage your child to journal.

HELP THEM OVERCOME WEAKNESSES

- ✧ Encourage child to not be judgmental.
- ✧ Promote forgiveness.

Golden retriever (Peacemaker/phlegmatic) This peacemaker tells jokes and helps others relax.

NURTURE STRENGTHS

- ✧ Teach God's love and forgiveness.
- ✧ Share your relationship with Jesus
- ✧ Dwell on stories of compassion (Jesus healing, Joseph's family reunion).
- ✧ Use John 3:16 to show that Jesus' saving love.
- ✧ Use a concordance to find verses on peace.

HELP THEM OVERCOME WEAKNESSES

- ✧ Encourage completing tasks on time.
- ✧ Help child pray for what they cannot solve.

Resources:

The Treasure Tree: Helping Kids Understand Their Personality by J.Trent, ISBN 0849958490

Personality Plus by F. Littauer, ISBN 0800744071

Character Development

but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children... For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory. 1 Thessalonians 2:7, 11-12

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO NURTURE?

To nurture means to cultivate. A gardener tends a beautiful plant by watering, exposing it to sunlight, and protecting it from weeds, disease, and pestilence.

Families nurture character through conversation, praise, modeling virtues, and by providing experiences that encourage character. Consider what character traits you want each person to develop. Set them as goals.

TEN GODLY CHARACTER TRAITS (add more you want to encourage) Each produces other positive traits.

- Compassion leads to kindness and generosity.
- Contentment guards against jealousy and envy.
- Faithfulness leads to spiritual growth and holiness.
- Honesty builds integrity.
- Justice moves hearts to mercy.
- Love promotes patience and understanding.
- Loyalty builds unity and promotes caring for other's needs.
- Perseverance helps a person succeed and overcome obstacles.

Responsibility leads to maturity, good work ethic, and self-respect.

Respect for authority brings order and harmony.

TIPS TO ENCOURAGE CHARACTER

Communicate. Conversations build relationship and transmit values.

Help others. Putting others first encourages compassion.

Always pray for each person's character growth.

Read about heroes with character.

Applaud each person's good virtues.

Commit to modeling virtues yourself.

Tell stories of family members of character.

Enjoy family traditions. Rituals identify and celebrate values.

Recognize and capture teachable moments.



FAILURE AS OPPORTUNITY

Failure reminds us we still need to grow. A child can choose to work to improve. Through practice and numerous falls a child learns to ride a bicycle and develops perseverance. Talk and discover lessons after a failure, Brainstorm about future attempts or decisions, and any need for assistance to learn.

GROWTH THROUGH TRIALS

Provide comfort and support when a family member faces a trial, whether it is school or job related, broken friendship, or a hardship. Actively listen. Only give advice if asked or if safety is a concern. Pray and trust that God will use the trial to nurture character.