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A ROADMAP TO HEALTHY CHARACTER: THE THREE PRINCIPLES OF WISE PARENTING

Does this sound familiar?

- 1. It seems like when I say NO my kids often just ignore me.*
- 2. No matter what I do, my kids don't get along. They fight most of the day.*
- 3. My child is really lazy about his homework – I think he just isn't trying hard enough.*
- 4. My child is addicted to his computer games. I tell him to stop, but he doesn't listen.*

Months and months of quarantine have left many of us depleted and exhausted. The one lesson almost all parents learned from this enforced family sequester is this: Parenting is extraordinarily challenging, difficult, and even impossible at times! We want to do the right thing for our children, but often we don't know what the right thing is!!

Parents need to be guided by a vision. It is simply not enough to channel whatever parenting you received from your own parents. Nor is it sufficient to mimic what your neighbors are doing. Why let the accidents of your history, the biases of your culture and the blind spots of your community dictate who your child will become? But what vision should guide you?

Parents should help their children develop **a success identity**, one not based on material achievement but instead **based on a healthy, strong, positive character**.

But what is healthy, strong, positive character? *Character is who we are, what we value, what we do, habitually, rain or shine, whether someone is watching or not, whether we are in the mood or not, whether it leads to immediate payoffs or not.* We want our children to develop character in the realm of relationships and in the realm of work. We want them to manifest relationship and work virtues.

Relationship character is related to our treatment of other people. We help our children develop empathy, kindness, respect, tolerance, responsiveness to others of significance, and the ability to forgive after conflict and hurt.

Work character is related to the way we handle work/school demands. We help our children develop perseverance, grit, the ability to delay immediate pleasure, the capacity to work well with others, and the positive attitude that effort will slowly but surely lead to success.

THE ROADMAP TO HEALTHY CHARACTER IN OUR CHILDREN:

- 1. Accept your child as he/she is.** Do NOT impose any preferred image of what you wish your child should be or should become.

INSTEAD OF: *“You’re just making excuses about math again. Are you even trying?”*

TRY: *“Even though you think you stink at math I think you’re still a wonderful kid with lots of fun ideas.”*

INSTEAD OF: *“I wish you were more like your sister. She ALWAYS listens.”*

TRY: *“I love your rambunctious energy. And you are making good progress in learning how to listen and cooperate. Let’s keep helping you learn.”*

2. Set and consistently enforce the standards, limits and rules which reflect your core family values. Do NOT impose spur of the moment orders and do not shout instructions and directives based on whims and emotions of the moment.

INSTEAD OF: *“I keep telling you to help with the cleanup. You aren’t listening at all!”*

TRY: *“You aren’t listening to the rules we’ve agreed upon, so here is your consequence.”*

INSTEAD OF: *“I wish you were more like your sister. She ALWAYS listens.”*

TRY: *“I love your rambunctious energy. And you are making good progress in learning how to listen and cooperate. Let’s keep helping you learn.”*

3. Encourage your child to be a self-directing, responsible choice-maker who learns, with your help, from their own choices. Do NOT dictate their choices and do NOT shame or criticize your child about their poor choices.

INSTEAD OF: *“You’re doing the same dumb things over and over again. What’s wrong with you?!”*

TRY: *“A lot of kids make that same mistake. Let’s talk together to see what we can learn from this mistake.”*

INSTEAD OF: *“You must go and apologize to your friend for forgetting his birthday.”*

TRY: *“You forgot your friend’s birthday. How do you think he felt? What would you like to do to fix this?”*

Successful implementation of these three principles, *applied with empathy and wise judgment*, leads to the development of children who have successfully achieved positive, healthy character in both relationships and schoolwork as they prepare for marriage and careers. You will be proud of having helped develop your children into adults of strong and healthy character.

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