

RAISING CHILDREN WITH HEALTHY AFFIRMATION

Much like regular watering is needed to nourish seedlings and growing plants, authentic words of affirmation help children grow and thrive.

We've all been around those annoying parents who think their children are incapable of doing anything wrong. (Narcissists under development) That's not healthy affirmation.

However, more often than not, as children grow, they'll be much better versed with what's "wrong" with them than what's "right" about them. The incessant competition in the world, the plague of social media comparison and mean comments from other children all contribute to making them more aware of their "deficiencies" than of their strengths and positive attributes.

That's why we, as parents, have such an important role to play in continuing to remind our children of who they are, Whose they are, and why they are uniquely and wonderfully made.

Perhaps you weren't raised in an encouraging environment yourself and you struggle with how to be genuinely affirming to your family. Don't despair! Everyone is capable of learning how to be an affirming, encouragement parent.

Consider me your "encourage-mentor!"

Here are 10 ideas for raising children with healthy affirmation:

1. **Write your child annual birthday letters.** Begin by writing your child a letter on the day of their birth. Express your feelings, hopes and prayers about becoming their parent. Some choose to do this in a journal. Every year, write your child a birthday letter, talking about how you have seen them grow and develop over the past year. Focus on the positive character qualities you see developing. Some parents choose to share these letters with their children as they grow. Others wait for a later date. Some find it helpful to keep notes throughout the year to help remember special moments. And it's never too late to start this tradition, no matter your child's age.
2. **If writing an annual birthday letter seems overwhelming, then please write your child at least one letter** when they are under ten and one letter when they are a teenager. None of us is promised tomorrow, and each child deserves to have something in writing that expresses a parent's love and belief in them. Even if you are great at verbal affirmation, please take the time to write your child a letter. It is lasting and can be read and re-read any time your child needs a boost. As the saying goes: "Memories fade, but ink lasts."
3. **As they grow, make it a practice of looking for things your child does right.** Don't consider it your responsibility to pick out all of the things they do wrong. You are not a quality control expert. Pick your battles and major on the majors.
4. **Write lunch-box notes on a daily basis.** If you pack your child's lunch, even occasionally, enclose a note on an index card or a napkin with a few words of affirmation or encouragement. While your child is young, add a sticker or two for fun.

5. **Make affirmation a family practice.** On each family member's birthday, establish the "heart happy" tradition. As you eat birthday cake, go around the table and have each person share one thing about the birthday celebrant that makes your "heart happy." When a child grows up experiencing that type of affirmation, they are reminded of their special qualities and will learn by example of how to be affirming to others.
6. **Remember: "when you're inside the jar, you can't read the label."** Children often can't see their gifts, strengths and their unique attributes. As parents, we have a responsibility to help our kids discover their unique gifts and passions. Don't insist on your child becoming a "mini-me." Allow them to explore different sports, hobbies and interests. Just as each person has a unique set of fingerprints, your child is uniquely wired.
7. **Decorate your child's room with affirming words.** As a child approaches the middle school years, consider making a wall design highlighting their strongest qualities. A visual reminder of their strengths is a great antidote to the constant challenge of comparison.



8. **Don't just praise results. Praise character qualities, too.** For example, you can congratulate a child on making an A, but don't forget to affirm the diligence they showed in studying or doing a thorough job on a project.
9. **Avoid comparison.** As Teddy Roosevelt said, "*comparison is the thief of joy.*" And our children are saturated with comparison as they grow. Everyone's life looks better on social media. As parents, we can demolish a child's self esteem by comparing them to someone else, whether it's a sibling or classmate. Instead, look for opportunities to tell your child the qualities about them that you cherish.
10. **Pray over your child** and let them hear you thanking God for making your child in such a special way. Express your gratitude to God for specific character qualities you see in your child. Constantly remind your child of how much God loves them and that His love isn't based on their performance. Look at FathersLoveLetter.com for an incredible list of Scripture verses that describe the Father's love for each of us.

