

# Parent Partnership Handbook

## *A Parent Guide for Middle-School Years*

### The Social 'Tween

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**H**ow we perceive ourselves affects how we relate to others. However, contrary to media messages, self-esteem does not evolve because of body shape, athletic prowess, power, prestige, or possessions. Like happiness, authentic self-esteem follows our choices and behaviors. When we act or choose not to act and then evaluate our practice, if we respect the decision or experience well-being, pleasure, or satisfaction about that decision, we foster positive self-esteem. In the reverse, if we experience disappointment, emptiness, or destructiveness when we examine the actions or the inaction of our day, we add kindling wood to the fire of negative self-esteem. Self-esteem begins with a sustained experience of unconditional love and then evolves through repeated experiences of security, autonomy, initiative, and industry.

Psychologist Erik Erikson explained that each stage of psycho-social development involves a battle between two conflicting forces. For instance, the initial stage involves trust versus mistrust. No one can provide or experience trust on a 24/7 basis, but if the pattern of experience is one where a child trusts and things evolve as expected, then security is strengthened and that leads to self-confidence. If, on the other hand, a child trusts but then is denied or disappointed in the way things evolve, that child learns to mistrust. A pattern of disappointment or broken promises leads to a sense of insecurity. Note, please, that mistrust is not a bad thing. We all need a sense of mistrust in order to be safe. It is a pattern of mistrust that becomes problematic.

#### Pre-'Tween Development

Prior to middle school, 'twens passed through three stages of social development. Stage one involved the issue of *trust versus mistrust*, the major psycho-social life task between birth and age two. Stage two, *autonomy/self-control versus shame/doubt/compulsion* was the psycho-social focus from 18 months through age three. Stage three, the psychological conflict of preschoolers (ages 3-4-5), involved *initiative versus guilt/inhibition*. The very good news is that it is never too late to make a difference! A middle-school 'tween is capable of being taught to understand the elements and to make choices that increase security, autonomy, and initiative.

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#### 'Tween Competence

Stage four, the development of industry, is the major psycho-social task of the elementary school years (ages 6-12) and, therefore, the necessary focus for middle school 'twens (ages 11-13). The crisis at this point involves **industry versus inferiority**. Industry is the capacity to be persistent and diligent, to follow through on a task, and to create a systematic approach for problem solving and accomplishing responsibilities. Industry creates a positive energy within the child whereas inferiority invites inertia, an inability or unwillingness to act. The positive resolution of stage four develops a sense of method within the child and the ego-quality of competence. Parents and teachers who contribute to a child's growth in industry stave off the tendency to inferiority. Generally, middle-school 'twens enjoy projects and group experiences. Both are social in nature and their success requires stick-to-it-tive-ness.

#### Proactive Parent Practices to Develop Industry

- Provide repeated, systematic instruction in the world of tools, i.e., house appliances, screwdriver, wrench, pliers, rake, lawnmower, etc.
- Teach skills like cooking, cleaning, ironing, laundry care, sewing buttons and snaps, etc.
- Foster reading, summarizing, and study skills.
- Engage 'twens in tasks that require steady care over time, being productive, and accomplishing, i.e., watering plants, pet care, weekly service project, etc.
- Cultivate deadlines, time management, and organizational skills.
- Create long-range projects with check-in points.
- Work side-by-side on a difficult task. Refrain from doing the work for the 'tween.
- Model and teach how to set a goal, to name specific parts/objectives related to the goal, and to determine a reasonable timeline and periodic means of evaluation. Restructure when necessary. ▲



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