

Valuing Children's Intelligence

Tip – It's important to distinguish between intelligence – having a wide range and depth of knowledge – and wisdom, which is being able to use knowledge well in daily life.

Our culture values intelligence. We begin to see this in infancy when proud parents and grandparents label a child “smart” as she reaches a developmental milestone early or talks better or sooner than the other children on the block. When children start school great attention is paid to their academic progress and grades. It is generally looked upon favorably to be thought smart or intelligent. Adults who are learned and can converse knowledgeably on a range of subjects are considered intelligent.



Harriet Heath, Ph.D., psychologist and author of *Using Your Values to Raise Your Child to Be an Adult You Admire*, analyses the value of intelligence in her helpful book. She comments that intelligence is based on having information and having the skills to use it appropriately—in other words, being able to think and to express those thoughts.

Heath cautions parents that all children go through the same developmental stages. It is common for parents of intelligent children—especially ones who are highly verbal—to assume that they understand a situation better than they do. She reminds us that all children, even highly intelligent ones, need guidance and direction. Another area of caution is an intelligent teen. No matter how gifted or sophisticated the teenager seems, remember his or her lack of experience when you guide him or her. A teenager simply hasn't had enough time and experience on this planet to avoid all the pitfalls in life s/he will encounter. Intelligence is not a substitute for experience.



Tools – Most parents of intelligent children naturally nurture this characteristic. They provide appropriate stimulation for babies, support exploration in the early years, provide all sorts of learning opportunities, and support academics when their children start school. Heath says there is room for improvement, however, in the area of decision making. She points out that intelligence by itself does not guarantee that a child will make wise decisions, act with consideration towards others, or know how to keep a job. Values (first yours, then hers) will guide her thinking. A strong base in values – caring, empathy, honesty, cooperation, etc. – will give your child's natural bent toward intelligence direction and purpose. And parents are absolutely central in teaching and imparting those values.

You'll find more practical tips you can use right now in *Using Your Values to Raise Your Child to Be an Adult You Admire* by Harriet Heath, Ph.D.