

How Children Acquire Values

Tip -- If a certain attribute is not part of your child's temperament, you will have to deliberately teach that value.

We all know children who are born assertive. This baby cries energetically when uncomfortable, coos happily, or crawls determinedly toward something he wants. When older, he may be the first one to suggest a play idea, gather support for it, and lead the play. On the other hand, he may also be the one who shoves or pushes to get his way. All of these behaviors show assertiveness.



Many parents value a healthy dose of assertiveness and are pleased to see a sprinkling of these behaviors in their children. But what if you have a child who is very quiet and passive -- who lets other children take toys away from him or fails to stand up for himself when wrongly accused? According to Harriet Heath, Ph.D., author of *Using Your Values to Raise Your Child to Be an Adult You Admire*, any value you wish for your child and don't see early on in his personality, you must deliberately teach.

Think of the values your child shows in her temperament as gifts. Either these are traits you do not need to teach or need to merely temper, as necessary. Take care that these in-born traits you value are nurtured. For example, most children are born with strong curiosity. If this is curbed too severely in the early years, curiosity will not flourish as the child grows and can be lost.

Tools -- Dr. Heath provides the following questions and pointers for how to deliberately instill a value in your child.

- **Identify a value you find yourself working to preserve in your child.**
- **Write down your plan for teaching this value to your child.** Think about everyday situations that come up and how you could respond to it based on this value. For example, if you wish to teach the value of caring, how you delegate household jobs might include having your six year old help his three-year-old sister get a snack or assign him pet care duties.
- **Name a value of yours that your child needs information or skills to be able to display.** Many values need to be taught gradually over time. For example, "making thoughtful decisions" is a value/behavior that children need information, skills, and practice in order to fully acquire.
- **Write down your plan for helping your child learn what he or she needs.** Describe as best you can what skills the child needs and then connect that with everyday teaching opportunities you have as a parent. For example, in order to make thoughtful decisions, a child needs to gather information, look at the alternatives, and make a choice. If you have a preschooler, you can give him lots of decision-making opportunities throughout the day. A school-aged child can begin to learn how to gather information and be encouraged to thoughtfully analyze options.

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.