

King Louis had been taken from his throne and imprisoned. His young son, the prince, was taken by those who dethroned the king. They thought that inasmuch as the king's son was heir to the throne, if they could destroy him morally, he would never realize the great and grand destiny that God had bestowed upon him.

They took him to a community far away, and there they exposed the lad to every filthy and vile thing that life could offer. They exposed him to foods the richness of which would quickly make him a slave to appetite. They used vile language around him constantly. They exposed him to lewd and lustful women. They exposed him to dishonor and distrust. He was surrounded twenty-four hours a day by everything that could drag the soul of a man as low as one could slip. For over six months he had this treatment—but not once did the young lad buckle under pressure. Finally, after intensive temptation, they questioned him. Why had he not submitted himself to these things—why had he not partaken? These things would provide pleasure, satisfy his lusts, and were desirable; they were all his. The boy said, “I cannot do what you ask for I was born to be a king.”

I include this story because this is the attitude we want for our children; the pervasive knowledge that they are here to give to glory to God as His sons and daughters. They, too, are part of God's royal family. We want them to have the keen sense of who they are and how to respond to temptations. As adults, it is easy to remember that kind of peer pressure. At Aquinas, we are fortunate that so many of the usual “types” of peer pressure are seen very little or not at all. However, I am asked by parents who are looking at colleges for their children, if there is a college or university where they can keep their child safe and sheltered from so many of the problems we see in our society. Unfortunately, a utopian college campus is not the norm. If one exists at all, I have yet to hear about it. So, it becomes necessary to give your child the skills, insight, and faith that will help them navigate the perils and temptations of life.

As with communication skills, self-confidence is best fostered starting at an early age. In education, the term for building one concept upon another is called “scaffolding.” This concept may also apply to building self-confidence. In effect, one successful decision and its outcomes will lead to another. So, as parents and educators, what can we do to help our children feel comfortable enough with themselves that the only option they see, is to do the right thing?

I've gathered a few tips and ideas from a number of sources to aid us in helping our children see themselves as beautiful and worthwhile people:

** Unplug. A number of studies have indicated that our children are more stressed and more anxious than ever due to the never-ending influx of technology. So, experts are telling us to unplug. Put the phone, music, computer, and television away for a while every day. Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and other social networking sites, though beneficial to keep in touch with family or friends, can be a minefield for bullying as there seems to be a temptation to be crass due to the apparent anonymity of the virtual world. Too much time on these sites is a drain on valuable free time and can increase stress. Unplugging for specific times each day creates a “pool of silence” that can help to decrease stress and anxiety, especially for teenagers, and the reprieve will give your child some much needed “down” time. This freedom allows your child to explore different avenues and find new gifts and talents. The more skills your child discovers, the more confident he will become.

** Take a walk. A refreshing, brisk walk through the woods or the neighborhood can be just the thing to clear the mind of all the clutter that has infiltrated throughout the day, but please be sure to leave phones at home. This is a good habit to start early in your child’s life. Though it can be a bit tedious to hear your 8 year-old tell you every detail of her day, the more she talks to you now, the more likely she will talk to you later about the pressures and fears she faces.

**Affirm. Be the person your child can go to when he is not feeling confident. Use those parental instincts that God gave us to say things like: “Yes, you should run for school president. Or, “Yes, try out for the school drama.” It is important for your child to know that you are the one who will affirm and guide. It is so much better to establish this support early so that when peers become important, he will know that you are still the “go-to” person.

**Tell the truth. Just as you have to be the one who listens to your 8 year-old tell you playground stories, you also have to be the one to tell your teenager exactly what you think. This may sound like, “I’m sorry that test didn’t go well for you, but it’s not because you aren’t good at that subject. It’s because you didn’t study.” Or, though this can be a tougher conversation, “I know you are dating so and so, and I’ve noticed that he doesn’t bring out the best in you....” Obviously these things aren’t fun to say, but your child will count on you to be honest. Sometimes, believe it or not, he will see the same thing that you see, but it’s difficult for him to know

how to solve the problem. Offer yourself as an “out” for him. Maybe he really doesn’t want to go to the party “that everyone else is going to”, but hesitates to appear to be different. It is an easy way for him to get out of difficult circumstances by blaming his uncool parents every once in a while.

**Expose your child to people of all ages. This can help your child to know that there is a world beyond his peers. Grandparents, adults, and kids of all ages are crucial for developing positive self-images. A job can also be an effective way of exposing your child to new people. The skills and responsibility gained from successfully performing a job can be a great benefit to your child’s self-confidence. This is true no matter how humbling the work may be. As St. Therese often noted, “Doing small things with great love is a path to heaven.”

A true and positive self-image may be the difference between succumbing to temptations and peer pressure, or rising above a challenge and building a life of good decisions and peace. If ever in doubt, try to remember the motto: Prepare the child for the path, not the path for the child.

For additional information or to see an article about Aquinas alum, Emily Blume, who is finding a wonderful way to give college kids a smart alternative, please see the following:

http://m.pittnews.com/news/article_00ee7a96-0e12-11e3-8e88-001a4bcf6878.html

Covey, Sean. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*. Simon & Schuster. New York:1998.

Phillippe, Jacque. *Interior Freedom*. Scepter Publishers, Inc. New York: 2007.

www.askdrsears.com/topics/child-rearing-and-development/12-ways-to-build-self-confidence