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SP488-A-Enjoying Each Child as an Individual

The University of Tennessee Agricultural Extension Service

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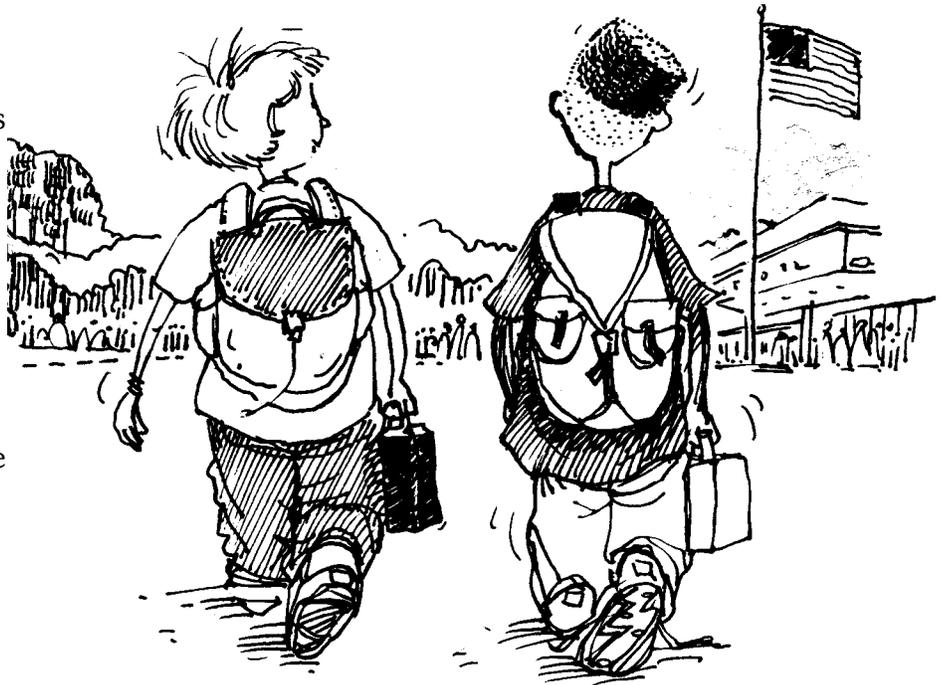
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PRINCIPLES OF Parenting

Enjoying Each Child As An Individual

We expect adults to be individuals, to have likes and dislikes, to be good at some things and not at others. But it often surprises us that children are unique individuals with their own tastes, styles, and abilities.

All children have different rates of development and different personalities. Knowing this can help us be patient. We can show our children that we really care about them by accepting each child as an individual.



Remember that some children are easy to care for and not very demanding. Others are fussy and difficult to care for. You may have children who are very different from one another even though you've tried to treat them the same. One child may cry a lot when he is sleepy or off his schedule. Rather than seeing your child as "bad," accept the fact that your child's body requires that he stay on a schedule. Some children are more difficult to care for, and it doesn't mean that the child is bad or that you are a bad parent.

Accept children as individuals.

Don't try to make a child something she is not. It's like trying to change a rose into a daisy: it takes a lot of work, and the results are disappointing.

I remember a mother telling me that when she heard her teenage daughter walking up the sidewalk after school she became mad before she even saw her. The mother and daughter had fought so often that the mother would get mad even thinking about seeing her daughter.

Although most parents may think they accept their children, what they do or say may tell children something else. For example, if parents compare, constantly correct, or ignore a child, the child may not feel loved or valued. The child may feel that his parents reject him.



Sometimes parents compare one child to another. For example, have you ever commented to a child how poorly she does in school compared to an older brother or sister? The parent who does this probably hopes to motivate the child. But it is more likely to make her discouraged or angry.

Sometimes we talk too much about a child's mistakes rather than his good qualities. Sometimes we use labels like "dumb," "bad," or "stupid." Sometimes we are critical of things in our children that we don't like in ourselves. Sometimes we ignore one child and give lots of love and attention to another. Such treatment can make a child feel worthless and unloved.

What can you do to show your children that you value them for who they are? There are three ideas that are important to teach your children:

- You have talents.
- No one has every talent.
- You can use your talents to help others.

It's very important to send these messages to your children. Here are some ideas that may help.

You have talents.

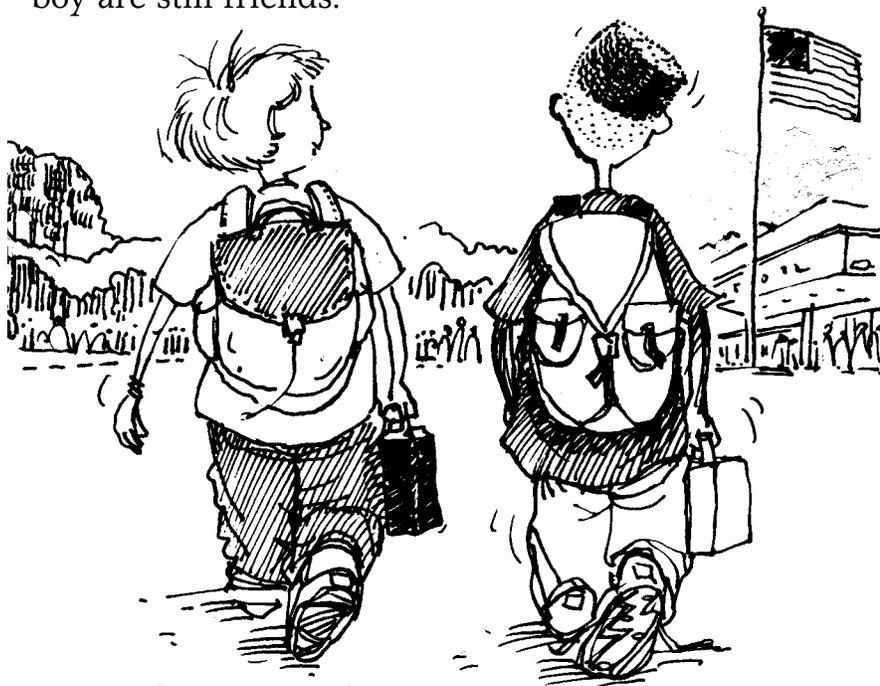
Every child is good at something. Maybe your child is athletic or creative or dramatic or smart or good at caring for younger children. There are many different talents. Even some things that we see as faults can also be seen as talents. For example, the child who cries easily may be very sensitive or dramatic. The child who is stubborn may also be intelligent and able to see things a different way. The child who is "into everything" can also be seen as energetic and curious.



Watch for the things that each child loves to do. Appreciate their strengths. Tell them about the good you see. Be patient with their weaknesses. Teach them skills to help them deal with their weaknesses.



Tom is a very sensitive boy. One day he came home very upset because a classmate had been teasing him about his hairstyle. We talked to him about how frustrating it is to have someone make fun of you. And we talked about how to deal with the teasing. We decided that when the boy teased him again Tom would laugh about the teasing and then ask the classmate about his classes or hobbies. We hoped Tom could use his sensitivity to build a friendship. It worked. Tom and the boy are still friends.



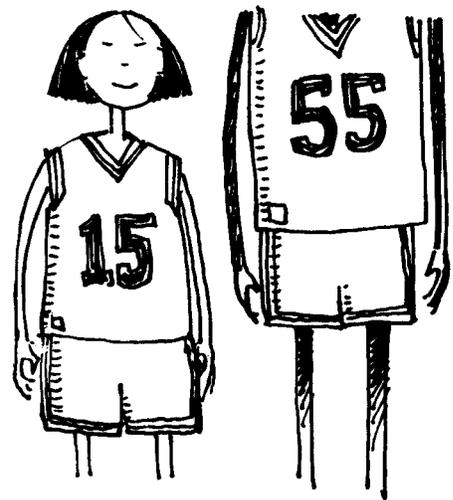
No one has every talent.

Children often become discouraged because of talents or qualities they don't have. A child may want to be athletic, scholarly, and handsome but may be gentle and caring. We may encourage the child to further develop the qualities and talents he does have: "Thank you for helping Mrs. Jones with her leaves. I enjoy the kind way you help people." We can remind him that the talent he does have is important to us.

Often children compare themselves to someone they want to be like. They may become very unhappy that they are not more like their hero. We can help by understanding their disappointment but reassuring them that we are glad for what they are. "I like you just the way you are!"

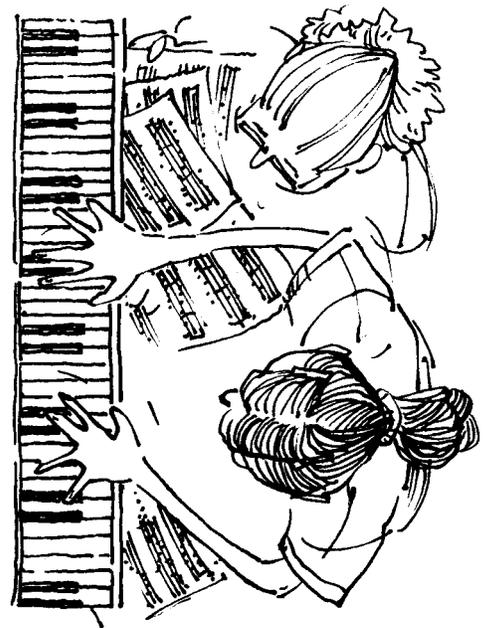
Sometimes children think they'll never be able to draw, swim, or play ball as well as another child. One helpful mother reminded her daughter that children learn to swim at different ages. Another wise mother showed her young son some of his earlier drawings so he could see how much his drawing had improved.

Each child can learn to enjoy and use the talents he or she has, rather than be miserable wishing for other talents.



You can use your talents to help others.

Teach each child how to use her talents to help others. For instance, you may have a child who would rather study than play with other children. Since it's important for children to have friends, you might encourage your child to invite another child over to study. Or encourage her to help someone who has a hard time in class. This would allow the child to use her talent with other children while doing what she enjoys. She will see her ability as a strength and not a weakness. Though she might not grow up to be a great tennis player, she might become a great teacher or college professor.



Use the form below to decide how you can help each of your children develop his or her talents.

Name of child

What does the child like to do?

talents

What are some outstanding things this child does?

What are some personal shortcomings this child worries about?

How can you help him or her use personal strengths to balance the shortcomings?

What can you say or do to help the child be aware of his or her talents?

What can you do to help the child use his or her talents to help others?

Each child has different talents and different weaknesses. When we learn to enjoy all of our children as individuals, appreciate their individual talents, and help them use their talents, we help them grow into capable, loving people.

If you want to learn more . . .

Faber, Adele, and Mazlish, Elaine (1980).

How To Talk So Kids Will Listen And Listen So Kids Will Talk. New York: Avon.

Ginott, Haim (1956). *Between Parent And Child.* New York: Avon.

This publication was originally written by H. Wallace Goddard, Extension Family and Child Development specialist, Auburn University, for the Alabama Cooperative Extension Service. It was adapted for use in Tennessee by Kathleen Rodgers, former Assistant Professor, Family Life.



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Agricultural Extension Service

Billy G. Hicks, Dean