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Building Character for Time and Eternity

BY SUSAN E. MURRAY

As Christian parents, we are committed to building character in our children that will be instrumental in their search for finding meaning and purpose in this life, gaining the ability to shape their own lives, learning how to interact with and contribute to others, all while keeping their eyes on Heaven.

As a result of the study, “Don’t Forget the Families,” Search Institute (2015) introduced a framework of developmental relationships, identified as close connections through which young people develop their character strengths. These relationships are characterized by five essential actions, described below from the perspective of a young person.



1) *Express care.* Show me that you like me and want the best for me by listening, paying attention when you are with me, letting me know you like being with me and expressing positive feelings toward me. Invest time and energy in doing things for and with me, making it a priority to understand who I am and what I care about, and being someone I can count on and trust.

2) *Challenge my growth.* Insist that I try to continuously improve, helping me see future possibilities for myself and making it clear you want me to live up to my potential. Recognize my thoughts and abilities, but also hold me accountable for appropriate boundaries and rules.

3) *Provide support.* Encourage me; guide me with practical assistance and feedback to help me learn; model and advocate for me.

4) *Share power.* Hear my voice and let me share in making decisions, respecting me by taking me seriously and treating me fairly. Negotiate with me, respond by understanding and adjusting to my needs, interests and abilities; and work with me to accomplish my goals and solve my problems.

5) *Expand possibility.* Expand my horizons and connect me to opportunities by exposing me to new ideas, experiences and places. Introduce me to people who can help me grow, and help me work through barriers that could stop me from achieving my goals.

Parenting adults with stronger relationships with their children were more likely to report their children were on track in developing key character strengths including taking responsibility, managing emotions and being concerned for others. According to the research, the quality of parent-child relationships is 10 times more powerful than demographics (race, ethnicity, family composition and family income) in predicting whether children are developing the critical strengths needed for success in school and life.

Developmental relationships in families play a powerful role in children’s growth, something we must not underestimate in our homes and in our churches!

Susan E. Murray is professor emerita of behavioral sciences at Andrews University, certified family life educator, and licensed marriage and family therapist.

Resource: <http://www.parentfurther.com> (Quizzes and more than 100 family activities to help families explore and strengthen developmental relationships.)

Pekel, K., Rochlkepartain, E. C., Syvertsen, A. K., & Scales, P.C. (2015). *Don’t forget the families: The missing piece in America’s efforts to help all children succeed (summary of key findings)*. Minneapolis, MN: Search Institute. Available at: <http://www.search-institute.org>