
Me? Critical?

On a message board, outside on our church property, the following statement to the community was written: “Children need models rather than critics”. It seemed to me to be a good slogan, certainly worthy of everyone’s consideration. How true the intent of the message if we are trying to instil in our children a positive attitude toward others and themselves.

We hear much about ‘self-esteem’. It seems to have become the buzz-word of the last couple decades. I fear that it, at times, is perhaps an over-emphasized concept. Many of the woes that beset our young are blamed on low self-esteem. If we nurture children with a positive attitude, so that they in turn may embrace a positive attitude about themselves, good self-esteem will, to a great extent, be a natural result.

I prefer the term ‘self-worth’ over ‘self-esteem’. As a Christian I believe that my Creator intended all of us to be ‘of worth’. The old saying ‘God don’t make no junk’ would suggest that in God we have a definite worth. So do our children! It is our responsibility as adults and parents to help them realize that worth.

That is where the ‘model’, rather than the ‘critic’ comes into play. It is not, however, just the way we interact with our children that is important. It is important, but I believe the influence of the positive goes beyond the limited interaction of parent and child. We, as adults, need to remember that with children what is caught is just as influential as what is taught. We need to consider what our children hear us say, to and about others, or situations we find ourselves in.

What any of us say in ear-shot of children about our spouse, or the boss, or the neighbour, or the way so and so acted, or the way you got cut off in traffic, etc. is just as important as our direct contact with children. Modelling how to be positive and not critical in these areas is key to developing a positive attitude. Children need to know that we value their worth and they also need to see that we value the ‘worth’ in others. Being forgiving, patient, loving, understanding toward those we interact with, including our children, are just some

attributes that help build self-worth. The model must encompass all that we do and say, all that we are part of. It is not just limited to one line of interaction at one particular time.

This is a big challenge, too big for us to manage on our own. To be a really good model requires that we be filled with love for all – family, acquaintances, strangers, all whom we meet. May I suggest that, without God’s help, the required kind of love that puts a guard on our tongue, and guides our interactions, is not likely to manifest itself in our modelling? It is God’s desire that we grow to be an example of real love, to be a positive, caring model, not a negative critic. Our best example is Jesus Christ, who cares and will enable if given the opportunity.

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