



## Understanding Your Child's Uniqueness

We are not surprised when every adult has different likes and dislikes, different strengths and weaknesses, and a style all their own. But sometimes we don't think about the fact that the same is true of children. Each child has individual tastes, abilities, preferences, and style. One child may be very tender and get her feelings hurt easily. Another may take scoldings in stride. One child may be good with numbers while another prefers drawing. One child may be very gentle while another is full of energy. One child may value quiet time while another craves excitement. There are many ways in which children are different from each other! Notice your child's strengths and unique personality. Every child is good at something. Observing the things that your child loves to do gives you important clues about his or her talents. Watch for the things that each child loves to do. Appreciate their strengths. Tell them about the good you see.

**Find the good in mistakes and weaknesses.** No one is good at everything. Be patient with your children's individual limitations. In fact, you can think of their limitation in a positive way: The child who is stubborn has strong character. The child who cries easily may be very sensitive. The child who is "into everything" can be seen as energetic and curious. Emphasize the good in each child.

**Help your child develop strengths.** We can help each child find opportunities to develop. Howard Gardner says that we all have different abilities with seven different intelligences: The intelligences deal with language (good with writing or reading), logic (mathematics), music, movement (and athletics), visual (making pictures), interpersonal (understanding people), and intrapersonal (self-aware, coping). Whatever a child's interests and abilities, we can help them develop by talking about their ideas, going to libraries or museums of interest, and supporting their projects. Your child's interests are a foundation for building lifelong strengths.

We do not have talents so that we can be famous; we have talents so we can help each other. **Help your child find satisfying ways to use his or her talents.** One child might enjoy reading to a neighbor. Another child might enjoy building things. One child might enjoy tutoring other children. When we use our gifts to help others we both develop our gifts and make life better for people.

One of the most important things you will ever do as a parent will be to help your children discover their talents and find joy in developing and using them.

## Applications:

There are fun ways of discovering your children's interests and talents. Notice what they collect. Notice what they like to do or study. Notice what they like to talk about. It can take a whole lifetime to determine a person's gifts, but it is a satisfying investigation.

What are some ways you can let your child know about the strengths you see in him or her?

Do you find yourself comparing your children? It is more useful to enjoy each child's individual strengths than to compare them.

Do you have one child who is especially difficult or annoying? Try to notice the positive side of that child's abilities. For example, an "argumentative" child may be very logical. A "lazy" child may be very methodical or patient. If it helps you discover each of your child's strengths, talk with other people who see your child's strengths.

Be sure that each of your children spends time with people who love him or her. You may have a daughter who is encouraged by her 4-H leader. You may have a son who is challenged and supported by an uncle. Teachers and ministers can also help. In addition to providing your own support, help your children develop a network of caring adults.

Help your children use their talents in service. Service is a very important way of helping people learn to feel connected to other people. What can each of your children do that uses their talents and makes life better for people? Of course it does no good to force children to work for others. But most children will gladly help others when they can see ways to be helpful.