



## **AFFIRMATION: FOOD FOR THE SOUL**

by Lisa Hill DiFusco

If you want a home where raising teen-agers is a joy, not a challenge, then follow one simple rule while raising your children from as early an age as possible: affirm, affirm, affirm.

Several years ago, I was walking down a grocery store aisle and ran into a woman wagging her finger at her 4-year-old son. "You're a bad, bad, bad, boy," she said, over and over again with a smile on her face.

I couldn't help but wonder how this 4-year-old was taking in the information. He was getting his mommy's attention, but what was he really hearing?

HOW MANY of us realize that children do in fact grow up and display exactly the type of behavior we expect them to display? If I tell my son he's a slob, he will grow up and become a slob. If I tell him over and over again he's worthless, or lazy, or irresponsible, he will grow up and act worthless, lazy and irresponsible.

If on the other hand, I begin to affirm the good that I see in him, the qualities I admire, the values that feel important to me, he will aspire to those attributes.

There is one simple reason for this: what ever we focus on – be it a promotion at work or admirable qualities in a child – we increase in life.

To affirm someone means to appreciate them for who they are. It is different from praise. To praise someone means to acknowledge them for something they have done well. The key word here is "done." Praise sounds like "What a great report card, Jimmy!" or "Sarah, you did a good job setting the table or picking up your clothes!"

To praise someone – a child, an employee, or a spouse – is always good. But it has one drawback. While it feels great to receive praise, the recipient always knows that someone else can do it better. While Sarah hears she has done a good job picking up her clothes, she will innately say to herself, "Yes, but someone else can do better."

And herein lies the difference between praise and affirmation. When you praise someone for what they've done, they reap the good only inasmuch as their mind will compare their action with someone else's. And since someone else will always be able to do it better, their mind will often dismiss or minimize the good that they've received.

When you affirm somebody, however, you feed their soul. You appreciate them for who they are, rather than for what they've done. To affirm someone is to acknowledge the value of their "beingness" and for this reason affirmation extols the soul.

"I'm glad you're a boy, girl!" is a wonderful affirmation for a newborn baby. "I'm glad you're here." "Take your time" is one of my favorites for 2-year-olds. In fact, this pithy three word saying is one of the best ways parents can get their children to cooperate with them while they are in a hurry. Not only do children love to hear this affirmation, but so do adults in our fast-pace society. Watch a store clerk treat you differently the next time you tell him/her, "Take your time," even when you're in a hurry.

Toddlers want to know that it's OK to grow up. So to affirm a 3 or 4-year-old you can say, "I'm glad you're growing up." Six to twelve year-olds excel with, "You can trust your feelings to help you know," or, "You can do it your way."

Another powerful affirmation for a grammar school child is, "It's OK to disagree with me, you know." Children's confidence in their capability excels when they know the adults around them believe in them.

Try saying to your spouse in front of your teen-age son, "Matt always knows how to handle himself," and watch his eyes or non-verbal communication when you do. When you praise a child in front of another adult their belief in themselves swells.

Affirmations are food for the soul because people crave to be known from the inside out. Our greatest desire is to know and be known. When you affirm a child, a spouse, or an employee, you are stating in the positive tense the qualities about them you enjoy.

Whatever we focus on, we increase. If you let an employee know you believe in her (and in her performance), she can't help but increase her capacity for contribution to the corporation. If you affirm a best friend or a child, they can't help but excel. Human nature is to live up to what others expect of us.