

How to Build Christ-Confidence in Children

By: Lori Beard and Tommy & Eve Hullette

Sample Situation: When children say, “I can’t” (whether it is when doing math, cleaning their room, learning to ride a bike, or sitting still), their answer is an opportunity for discipleship. Let’s consider two appropriate responses depending on the situation:

Sample Response #1:

- 1) Agree with them that they are unable to anything on their own (John 15:5).
- 2) Remind them that God uses hard things to build trust in Him and strong character (James 1:2-4).
- 3) Encourage them to trust in God who loves to give strength to weak people so that He gets the credit when they succeed (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Sample Response #2:

In our home, we have coined a phrase, “Hullette’s don’t say, ‘Can’t!’ They say, ‘How?’” “I can’t” means they are either defeated or don’t care enough to try. It might be helpful to remember the following:

- Even though there are many things that we are currently unable to do, that does not mean that we will never be able to do them (i.e., physical tasks like folding clothes neatly and even moral issues like telling the truth or responding to evil with goodness).
- Ultimately, giving up—even on physical tasks—*is* moral because it usually involves a lack of self control (Galatians 5:23), a fear of not being the best (a.k.a., pride—Isaiah 2:17), or laziness (Proverbs 6:6-9). These character traits need to be replaced with perseverance, courage to do hard things, fear of God alone, and self discipline.
- Caving in under hard things provides an opportunity to expose various sins in a child’s heart and to teach them to rely fully on the Almighty One, who is able to help them *and* to change them (Isaiah 41:10)!

Sample Situation: A child asks if they are pretty or handsome or otherwise shows strong concern about their physical appearance.

Sample Response: You could say something like this, “Well, let me just tell you what God says. God says in Psalm 139:14 that you are ‘fearfully and wonderfully made.’ You are His work, and He says that all of His works are ‘wonderful.’ And do you know what He says is even more important than being pretty? Being like Jesus on the inside! . . .

For girls: “Take a look at Proverbs 31:30—‘Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, *but a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised.*’” (See also 1 Peter 3:4—“Your adornment must not be merely external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.”

For boys: 1 Samuel 16:7—“Do not look at . . . appearance or at . . . height . . . for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

Just a note here—kids need the Bible from birth, but you will have to simplify the words at times.

Sample Situation: When you want your child to know that you are very pleased with them, but you don't want them to boast in themselves.

Sample Responses: Praise the virtue or character trait that you see. Instead of "That's great!" or "You are so amazing," how about saying things like this. . .

- "I thank God that He created you just the way you are."
 - "I thank God that He let me be your daddy/mama."
 - "I thank God that He allowed us to share in your life because you are such a joy to us."
 - "I praise God that He has given you strength to keep working on this even though it is hard!"
 - "I believe that God is working to make you into a hard worker."
 - "You really persevered in finishing your homework."
 - "God has given you so many gifts; I wonder how He is going to use them to help others."
-

Sample Situation: When a child accomplishes something great (be careful what you laud as great—see Matthew 20:25-28, which teaches us so clearly that real greatness is serving others).

Sample Responses:

- "Praise God that He allowed you to have so much fun in your tournament. I am thankful that He helped you play so well and so hard. I loved how you encouraged your teammates and even the other team."
- Remind your children where their talents and gifts come from and who deserves their praise.
 - James 1:17—"Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow."
 - 1 Corinthians 15:10—"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me."

This is very important as children need to be thankful to God for the things they are good at and not take credit for them themselves. It is urgent that we thank God for gifts such as a servant's heart, caring for others, compassion, mercy, purity—not just for those things that the world values (like beauty, intelligence, or athletic ability).

Sample Situation: A child is bragging or making fun of someone else for not being as good as they are at something.

Sample Response: Here correction is in order. The God-inspired rebuke from 1 Corinthians 4:7 is helpful: "For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?"

Here is a rule of thumb that we hope is helpful—don't praise children for their "natural abilities" and "gifts." How can we praise children for things that received from God? Instead, commend them when they show godly character in whatever they are doing (like service, love, compassion, hard work, perseverance, humility, kindness, self-control, courage, honesty, dependability, gratitude, responsibility, generosity, diligence, discretion, obedience, reverence, conviction, patience, selflessness, leadership, tolerance, and the like.)—which are all a work of grace!