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Metro Lutheran
Positive Parenting
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NOT ALL RED TULIPS: CELEBRATING THE UNIQUE

For it was you who formed my inward parts;
You knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Psalm 139:12-14

After a l-o-n-g, dreary, colorless winter, I chanced to look out the window at my church to see a breathtaking array of color. There in the courtyard gardens were spring flowers - a riot of multi-colored tulips, crocus, daffodils, and hyacinth. Hungry for color, I marveled that the colors my mother told me didn't "go together" - the pinks and reds, purples and oranges - were glorious in combination, truly a visual symphony.

So what does this have to do with parenting? God sends us a unique array of children. Each is a precious, never replicated gift of God. The same is true of the parents, too. We don't "clash." We complement and complete one another. We are God's intended symphony.

How might we as parents and other loving adults support children to play their unique role in God's world? Nothing, nothing, nothing matters more to a child than to be uniquely known and understood. So how might we do that?

- Observe your child carefully. Really watch and listen. Ask good questions, the ones that cannot be answered with just one word. "Tell me more."
- Learn whether your child is an introvert or extrovert, which has nothing to do with social skills or friendliness. This is about where your child's energy is replenished. Introverts are filled up by spending time alone or with one or two trusted people. Extroverts are refilled by being with lots of people. Then, help your child get what they need.
- Know your child's temperament - high energy, low energy, positive, cautious, funny, serious, dive right in, observe and proceed, spontaneous, or planned. All are wonderful qualities. None are "right" or "wrong."
- What is your child's preferred learning style - visual, auditory, or kinesthetic? Learn how your child learns best ... and share that with their teachers and coaches and group leaders. Vary the ways in which you teach your child, whether it is how to tie their shoes or wash dishes, lay out their clothes for the next day or clean up their room.
- Explore the many forms of intelligence - spatial, linguistic, logical-mathematical, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic. There are so many ways to identify the gifts your child has been given.
- Provide opportunities, activities, and materials to explore these gifts.

- When others label your child's traits negatively, step in and rename. For example, if someone says, "Your son is shy," reply, "One of the qualities I respect in Ned is that he is very observant before he dives into a group."
- Let your child overhear you sharing your awe and delight in the gifts they have been given and the ways in which they are sharing them with God's world.
- Help siblings appreciate their differences, without competing.
- Spend time together and let your child know that you cherish that time.
- Tell them and show them how much you love them. In prayer, thank God for the gift of each child.

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

1. At a birthday celebration, give each person at the table a birthday candle. Carry the cake around, stopping for each person to insert their candle, naming one thing about the birthday kid, no matter how old, for which they thank God. Light the candles, sing the song.
2. Slim down the number of activities in which your family participates to make space for family time. Rotate who gets to choose what you do together. Savor the variety of interests, skills, and passions in your family.
3. Let each child pursue one unique interest. Have them tell about it, teaching you what they love. Then, celebrate as a family.
4. Resist the temptation to compare one child to any other, even in a positive way.
5. Let rooms and spaces for each child reflect their interests and preferences.