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Positive Parenting
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HAS ANYONE EVER TOLD YOU... ?

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 139:13-14

This morning, a beautiful young man named Tyrone waited on me as I was checking out at Target. After the transaction was complete, he looked at me and asked, "Has anyone ever told you that you have a beautiful smile?" I may not be able to wipe the resulting smile off my face all day!

Actually, I started the day doing a parenting lecture for men in recovery from alcohol and drug abuse. We began our session with each man sharing the story of a person who has treated them with respect ... and what they learned from that person about how to raise respectful children. The lessons they shared focused on deep listening, desiring to understand, loving unconditionally, believing in the person's possibilities, holding accountable, separating behavior (which was often problematic) from personhood (which is a child of God, created in God's image). All of them affirmed the vital importance of modeling the behavior you want. In parenting, you get what you give!

So, what does this have to do with positive parenting? For decades, I have shared with parents an insight that I believe to be true: Our children become what we tell them they are.

In 1988, Libby Roderick penned the words and music to a wonderful song, "How Could Anyone." Her lyrics echo what God declared about each of us, created in God's image, claimed in the waters of our baptism, and declared beloved now and forever because of Jesus.

How could anyone ever tell you

You were anything less than beautiful?

How could anyone ever tell you
You were less than whole?

How could anyone fail to notice
That your loving is a miracle?

How deeply you're connected to my soul.

So what have you told the children in your life that they are? Too often, we hear children being called names, belittled, demeaned, and criticized. We need to be the antidote to all that diminishes children. These are God's children, created in God's image. Let's be their mirror, naming their gifts and skills and healthy, positive character traits. Here are some ways to get started:

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

1. Look, really look, at each child who enters your life today. See one positive trait or behavior that you can affirm. Then, address that child, saying, "Has anyone ever told you ..."
2. For the child whose behavior is challenging and needs to be corrected, frame it this way: "Annie, taking the toy away from your little brother is not worthy of you. I know you to be a generous girl, who is capable of sharing with other children. I remember being at the park with you last week when you let a younger child get in line ahead of you for the slide."
3. Introduce the concept of a "do over." Invite the child who has done something out of bounds behaviorally to think of three different ways he or she could have said or done it, to be more kind and respectful. (In fact, my precious daughter-in-law has introduced this approach to all three of her children, when the day has gotten off to a bad start. She will announce, "This is a do over.")
4. When your child is having a "terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day," use the formula "Has anyone ever told you ..." to name something wonderful about this child. This is especially powerful when a friend has announced that he or she is no longer your child's friend. Name one or more qualities that make your child a really good friend. (This is not the

time to announce, “See. I told you that if you didn’t learn to ride a bike your friends would leave you behind.” This is a time to affirm your child, not gloat.)

5. Catch your child (or an adult, for that matter!) doing something wonderful, just what you hope and pray they will do over and over again. Say, “Has anyone ever told you ...” and continue by describing the behavior and the quality or value that it expresses. Remember, what gets attention, gets repeated!