



*From the library of The Identity Circle — Insights and ideas about leading, managing and living through the lens of identity.*

## ***Parenting through Identity – Honoring the Individual Inside Your Child***

### ***Synopsis:***

***As parents, we aren't naturally conditioned to think about raising children through the lens of identity; that is, deliberately helping them understand themselves and love themselves for who they truly are. Yet, helping a child understand his or her uniqueness and the potential it implies goes a long way towards ensuring that they are well-grounded human beings, that they find the right careers and companions, and are secure in who they are over the course of their lives, despite the challenges they will face.***

***Here, in brief, are 10 things a parent can do to honor the individual inside their child.***

1. **Recognize that your kids aren't you** and let go of the often, unspoken hope that they'll follow in your footsteps. It doesn't matter, one way or the other.
2. **Make a point of observing patterns of success** that begin early in childhood, and which are based on the child's achievements, both small and large. Play them back to the child in various ways.
3. **Play "what's possible" games** based on these patterns (If a child draws intricate mazes by hand, is good at graphics, often points out beautiful scenery or light, ask them to imagine how they might build a career around this 'gift' for design.)
4. Starting in high school and into college, **make the connection between success patterns and coursework.** Let education reinforce the child's natural strengths.
5. **Give children things to read that highlight the importance of knowing oneself**, as a prerequisite to making good decisions in life. (random articles from newspapers and magazines, children's books on self-esteem, books about identity, such as *The Alchemist* and my own, *The Identity Code*.)
6. **Help your kids look for the deeper capacities** that underlie their activities and interests (e.g., a love of travel may suggest a passion for history; an interest in research may reflect a capacity for discovery; success at certain video games may signal a natural understanding of strategy).
7. **Talk 'purpose' with your kids, early on.** Ask them provocative questions, the answers to which will mature with time: What matters most to you? What do you love most about life? In this vein, ask 'why' back. Young children, in particular, often ask why over and over again. When a child makes a statement or offers an opinion, ask them why they say that? Get them to explain their thoughts and feelings out loud.
8. **Use language that reflects an identity-based life.** Talk about having the courage to be yourself, the need to be authentic, the value of insight, the power of integrity.
9. **With teenagers, challenge the pull of popularity**, don't endorse it. Help them remember that following their gut is often better than following the leader, even when it doesn't feel good. Encourage them to trust themselves first.
10. **Set the example.** Get to know yourself. Articulate your own identity and communicate that to your children, so the dialogue between you can be two-way. Talk to them about who you are versus what you do. Get them to see that the labels we take for granted – father, mother, football player, dancer, Christian, Jew, etc. – hide rather than reveal what makes each of us the unique human being we are.