

Turning Your Child's Casual Interests Into Lifetime Strengths

Talking with children and teens about their interests is one way to develop strengths. It may be one of the most important ways to encourage children.

Just look. Listen. What do they like doing? What do they talk about? Pay attention—what obviously gives them joy? Enter into conversations. Watch what happens.

I recently spent some time with Lauren, an 11-year-old who loves photography, and her five siblings and parents. Lauren and her siblings obviously like nature. The children enjoyed pointing out the bunnies in their backyard and telling me stories about their imagined adventures.

After just a few minutes, Lauren asked her mom if she could use her camera. Because her mom quickly said yes, it indicated to me that it's a common request. As I watched Lauren, her picture-smart skills became obvious. She likes being able to see things more clearly through the camera's lens and capture what she enjoyed in pictures.

I loved her mom's support of her daughter's interest and budding talent. Lauren was careful with the camera as she spent time in the backyard and front. She showed us her pictures. As I commented on the details, she stood taller and ran to take more photos.

She came back often to show us more. It's not hard to encourage children. It's easy! Because intelligence can become strengths when interests are acknowledged, that's what we need to do. When Lauren's mom and I talked with her about specifics we noticed in her pictures, Lauren was encouraged.

She loved being reminded that she's nature smart and picture smart. I'm grateful her parents affirm her and her siblings with the "smart" language. This encourages children's interests and strengths. ... Children are talented. They are smart! Try spending quality time with children you know and be fully present and focused so you can talk about what interests them. Watch as they respond to your interest. Before you know it, interests will develop into strengths.

To God be the glory!

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