

Chapter 7: The Spiritual Strengths

Pages 178-179 If you encourage your child's natural spiritual assets – trusting heart and knowing and validating direct transcendent experience; encouraging natural love of nature, of spiritual ritual and prayer and right action, and the sense of family as special – these assets will develop into spiritual strengths with lifelong benefits.

More from the child leads to more from the parent – this is the family discovering its own pace, gently turning up the level of family spirituality. When we take a loving lead, they follow.

If in the first decade you support your child's spiritual development, cultivate these assets into the following six strengths – they become a reliable source for guidance, clarity, and a sense of purpose.

1. A child's spiritual compass: trustworthy and good for life

A child's inner life is an instrument of spiritual knowing, a trustworthy inner compass that aligns itself for health, and orients towards the truth and spiritual values.

We often speak of a “moral compass” that guides us to choose right over wrong. That moral compass is built upon the spiritual compass, which finds direction from the higher self guided by the transcendent relationship.

Pages 180 – 182 “I can see why you would be annoyed with that clique of girls...”

Example: Celine, a mother in her early thirties.

A spiritual compass and language with which to talk about it also helps children as they face social challenges. School is hard for little people, and their inner compass can become a ready intuitive tool with which to navigate the often-choppy waters.

2. Children are hard wired to hold family sacred and sustaining

Pages 182-187 Example: “What was Grandpa doing with the kite?”

Young children are naturally drawn to the specialness of family. The field of love is the basis for what I call the spiritual primacy of family, a child’s defining context for spiritual development and values. The field not only nurtures a child in the here-and-now family but also connects them to the loving presence and transcendent connection across generations. As children develop more advanced language and cognition, they carry that connection forward firmly in mind and heart.

When we perceive our family as sacred we (1) are more committed, loyal, and try harder in relationships (2) are more forgiving and appreciative of family members as individuals; and (3) see daily work as daughters, sons, parents, and spouses as an opportunity for spiritual growth.

3. Spiritual community gives your child an expanded family of kindred spirits

Pages 187-191 Beyond the solid foundation of family, a spiritual community gives your child the people and places to help cultivate these deep values. A religious community that is open and loving can be a spiritual home for your child, as we’ll see shortly, but it is by no means the only place where your child can cultivate the sacred space within and find spiritual connection.

Sports can be a natural mind-body-spirit experience for kids, packed with passion and purpose. Sports teams tap into kids’ hardwired spiritual values: for selfless commitment, collective practice, ritual, play, and higher purpose.

Kids are naturally drawn to the ritual and ceremony experiences: music, movement, and imagery; spiritual story, myth, and symbolism; and perhaps even the feel of ceremonial robes and objects.

4. Spiritual multilingualism is your child’s passport

Pages 191-198 Spiritual multilingualism enables us to cross familiar borders and embraces the essence of spirituality in its many cultural narratives.

No matter what we think about religion, we want to be sure children are open to the spiritual presence in all people. You want your child to be as attuned to spirituality as possible. As parents, we want to act early, deliberately, and swiftly. Your child is ready to understand other faiths, traditions, and cultures. Speak about other religions with interest, share what you know, learn more together, and see what your own natural spirituality can find expression in other faith traditions.

Example: New York City field trip – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

If you welcome questions they will come. The child is making sense of messages without, trying to link up these messages with experiences of the heart.

5. Spiritual agency empowers children to create a culture of love

This growing awareness of spiritual agency becomes the practice ground for cognitive empathy – consciously choosing to understand a situation from someone else’s perspective and to respond sensitively.

With an inner compass that points to right action, and having been encouraged to trust it, a child feels empowered to act. If you can stand up for yourself – and others – on the playground, you’re solid. Example: Four Squares

6. Transcendent knowing: dreams, mystical experiences, and other special knowing

Pages 201 – 204 Children have a natural and engaged attitude to that which matters most in life: love, connection, and oneness. Their heads and hearts engage strongly around transitions and at the borders of life, birth, and death.

Transitions are big in the first decade; titanic, really. Take, for example, the developmentally normative progression through school. Imagine having a new boss, with new rules and different organizational culture, and mixing up colleagues every year.

In the first decade we support our children as knowers, then in adolescence they will readily integrate this source for guidance, clarity, and a sense of purpose. They have infinitely greater resources if they can access their direct knowing, spontaneous intuition, and deeper inner wisdom.

If your child has developed these six strengths through the first decade, you can be sure that the transcendent relationship is alive and well, and we can say without a shadow of a doubt that you've laid the foundation, built and fortified it.