

***Discovering a Self—
Discovering the World***
Part Two

Seventh Grade! The voyage of personal discovery continues

***Important things to know about—
Helping 7th graders gain confidence***

- Why building confidence is crucial.
- What parents can do to help.
- Why mentors are so important to teens.
- Getting children involved in the community.

- They should be building solid relationships outside the family; and
- They should be feeling more confident about themselves as learners.

If they are struggling in school, get help *now*. Talk to teachers, school officials, or community organizations to find out if you can get tutoring help for your child. Don't, don't, don't just let them struggle and fall behind. Kids who are a grade behind now are much more likely to drop out of high school—which is a real tragedy.

Kids may act “cool” about failure, but in truth, ***failure makes everyone terribly unhappy***. Kids who fail don't like school, don't like themselves, and don't like most adults. School failure makes them more likely to take dangerous risks or make dangerous connections. Like everyone else, they are looking for some sense of acceptance and success.

It's important for their self-esteem that they get the help they need with schoolwork. It's also important that they find ways to be successful and powerful outside of school. Mentor relationships and community activities are great places to start.

**The power of a mentor;
the power of the community**

A mentor can be as simple as an adult friend who is not the child's main caretaker. Your child may not be very talkative at home, but probably likes to talk to other adults. Older brothers and sisters, aunts or uncles, teachers, coaches, and religious leaders—they all become very important. Teens are desperate for approval and advice from the outside world.

Mentors can act as powerful allies for your middle schooler. Adults who work with things your child is

Building confidence—feeling the power!

Have you noticed that your children are sort of “coming into their own”? About half way through 7th grade, kids seem to start finding themselves. They get clearer about what they value and about the things and people that interest them. That wonderful enthusiasm for new things can spill over to interest in the outside world—which is good, since they will be living in it pretty soon!

Some middle schoolers develop an interest in “heroes,” often entertainers or sports figures. Some kids feel powerless or unsuccessful, so they identify with people who represent success, feelings of power, or the ability to make changes in the world. Positive heroes can inspire; negative role models can hurt. Following “heroes” is fine, but it's more important for kids to feel their *own* power, their *own* success, their *own* ability to make a difference to other people, both in and out of school.

What parents can do to help

Parents and other caring adults can help middle-school children develop their confidence and feel their power in a lot of ways. Start with a checkup on where your kids are by now:

- They should be taking more responsibility at home and at school;

interested in—animals, children, sports, cars, wood-working, computers, whatever—can give your child the “inside scoop,” a direct look at the knowledge, tools, and discipline required to be successful in a craft. Mentors can give the feedback and encouragement children need and can also act as role models, providing great motivation for children to keep up in their school work. Mentors can give your child extra attention *and* a vision for the future.

Where do you start looking for a mentor or a link to the community? Look for clubs, community service agencies, or businesses that include kids in their activities. Consider religious or community groups that tutor young children, collect food for the needy, or send supplies overseas—your child may find an adult to talk to and a place to make the world a little better, all at the same time.

Or you can contact local groups organized around interests your child shares, like photography, cars, or planes. No matter how you find them, mentors and community connections can really give your teen chances to shine and succeed. Best of all, you have helped them start the career planning process.

Here’s how you can map out a plan with your kids. Look at the left-hand diagram below. Two sports-crazed teens listed all the jobs they could think of

that had to do with sports. Next they listed agencies and businesses that employ people who work in or around sports. With those two lists in hand, they talked to their parents and their friends’ parents, asked around at church, and checked the phone book for any good leads. Then they followed those leads until they found places to volunteer or get summer jobs. It worked!

Community connections = confidence

Have your children put what they love to do in the center of the blank diagram and follow those same steps. Your kids will make connections with people like them, who love the same things they love.

And there’s more: Your kids will learn how people make careers out of their passions. They will learn about organizations and resources in the community. They will learn about the wide variety of work and workers it takes to build a house, run a baseball team, teach a kindergarten class, or whatever else they are interested in exploring.

When you help your children connect to the community, you help them discover who they are and where they fit in the world. Their confidence in themselves will soar. And self-confidence is one of the best gifts we can give our children.

