

Labelling your child - help or hindrance?

by Maxine McLellan

Labels are important. Some labels save lives, such as those on foods identifying additives and possible allergens, and for physical problems such as diabetes and high blood pressure. Labels on hazardous materials are vital. Some labels save you money. Their information confirms, "I don't want that after all because ... it says dry clean only ... it is only half the strength I need ..." etc.

Some helpful labels can become detrimental and self-defeating. In educational fields it has become almost a mandate to "label" children that are difficult to deal with as a means of control. Labelled children are often left behind academically, shunned by peers and teachers, drugged, and given more labels such as uncooperative, slow, and lazy. The labels supposedly explain why the child is having difficulty but often become the "reason" the school system is unable to teach the child successfully.

Much mis-labelling goes on too! Often labelled children just cannot function within the school structure. Their genuine learning difficulties are magnified in group settings. They often become behavioural problems as they deal with chronic frustration and live down to the limitations they were labelled with.

Many families successfully educate at home children labelled as un-educable. There is a case of a nine-year-old girl who was labelled and put into a special class to learn basic life skills and minimal academics. Her teachers had declared that she would never succeed in mastering academics beyond a grade four level. She has been home educated since September of 1999, and it is obvious she will far exceed in every area the limitations placed on her. Her gifts and strengths are beginning to slowly blossom and show themselves now that the veil of self-rejection has been lifted from her little shoulders. This success and progress is not an uncommon scenario for home schooling families.

Children with learning and physical challenges and those with behavioural problems that are worse in group settings such as at school frequently benefit from instruction at home. Their difficulties are minimized and often overcome and their strengths are nurtured in the quieter, more personalized environment of the home.

Labels do not disqualify a parent from teaching their child. In fact, a parent may be more qualified than the experts who do not have the time and resources that the parent has at his/her disposal. (The class for the girl mentioned earlier did not have near enough books for all of the children because of government cutbacks!) There are

excellent, easy-to-use curriculum materials for teaching these children. It is important to be reminded that God created each of us with different strengths and weaknesses. He only expects our best efforts and does not expect us to measure up to the abilities of someone else. Capitalize on the strengths and strengthen the weaknesses!

If you are a parent who is home schooling your “normal” children but who has been afraid to bring your “disabled” child home from the school system, I encourage you to prayerfully consider the future education for that child. Perhaps fear is keeping you from doing what God is ready and willing to help you to accomplish in the life of your child. It takes time and commitment to work with a learning challenged child but the rewards are well worth whatever it takes.

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