

WE CAN ALL BE SPECIAL

by Sally Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

I have been avidly watching the Olympic Games during the last two weeks. How exciting it's been to see the different nations' teams excel. I just loved watching the delight on the faces of those who won medals. Some have looks of disbelief as they stare at the scoreboard and realize they actually won the race, while others are momentarily disappointed in missing a medal. Some are elated while others suffer the crushing blow of failure. All the while the crowd goes wild, waving flags from every corner of the world. What a sense of patriotism there has been...such a feeling of togetherness. It feels sometimes as if we have done it along with them. Certainly the teams themselves have been quick to recognize that it was the combined effort that made all the difference.

As I thought about the huge range of emotion during the Olympic Games and the massive recognition these successful athletes will enjoy for the rest of their lives, it made me consider the fragility of our own sense of value at various times in our lives. I must confess that although I do feel valued most of the time it does not take much to challenge my worth when something goes wrong and I am criticized or fail.

Firstly, we should consider how personal value is generated. What makes us feel good about ourselves? In my own experience my value has been influenced most by those who have encouraged me through their recognition of my skills or talents, through their acknowledgement of me doing a good job, of being a good friend, wife, mother and grandmother. I used to say that there is more value in the recognition of WHO you are rather than WHAT you can do, but I have now decided that a good part of who I am IS what I do.

If I feel fragile occasionally, how much more do children have this feeling when they have not received encouragement in their early years? How can we ensure that we give our children the value they deserve? The source of our value initially (as children) comes from our parents. When we are praised, we feel valued. Praise usually comes from meeting or exceeding expectations. This begins with training our children in strong family values such as loyalty, honesty, integrity, trustworthiness, respect, obedience and forgiveness. By demonstrating these traits they will grow up to become honorable citizens.

When our children develop a great work ethic they are less likely to get into trouble because they know that praise (for good behavior) makes them feel valued, while criticism (for negative behavior) makes them feel frustrated and worthless. When they are trustworthy they will be given responsibilities that will generate praise for a job well done.

As we mature, we do not need to rely on others' praise so much to know our worth. The older we get the more we realize that other people's opinions do not define us. The Bible tells us that we are so valuable that God gave His Son to die so that we could have life forever with Him. Wow! That is value indeed!

We need to give our children reassurance and praise regularly. We need to make sure that we concentrate more on the great things they do instead of constantly picking at the not so good. They don't forget our words. Those positive comments build up in their memory banks and should stand them in good stead when something negative happens. We need to encourage them, guide them through failures and help them to reach higher than they ever thought possible. The way they feel about themselves will charter the course of their lives.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.