Editor’s Letter Summer 2011

Have You Checked the Children?

June 1, 2011 By Kate Ferguson

When I first began researching this issue’s cover story about Kenya Moore and her commitment to building girls’ self-esteem and empowerment, I thought that she’d talk about how the media contribute to girls’ lack of these two much-needed confidence boosters.

Instead, she told me about being rejected at birth by her teenage mother and disappointed by an overwhelmed father who was unable to provide his daughter with the support she needed to grow up feeling valued and secure.

What Moore revealed made me stop and think. Despite the media’s influence on children, parents can still overcome the power that TV, movies and pop culture exert on kids. Think about it. Parents are the first people children spend a lot of time with. As their kids’ closest companions, parents are also their children’s first role models.

In this unique and complex relationship there is so much parents can do to help kids realize their value. After all, children use their families’ support to strengthen their self-esteem. This helps them gain the confidence they need to negotiate what can sometimes be a hostile world.

As I listened to the interview replay, I recalled a woman and her young daughter who lived in the same building I did. The two lived two floors below me, in the apartment directly across from my mother. (The girl’s father and mother weren’t together, but he visited on occasion.)

As the years passed, the woman’s routine verbal abuse of her child escalated. My mother befriended the young girl, who was then about 10 years old. When I visited my mom, I’d often meet her there. After the girl had lost her house key, her mother refused to give her another, so she’d go to my mom’s apartment and stay there until her mother got home from work. (It was either that or sit alone in the hallway to wait for her mother’s return.)

As the girl reached puberty, she began to change. She became precocious and flirtatious, very aware of her flowering sexuality and its power to draw men’s interest. I found myself worrying about her. I felt that since she’d been denied her mother’s love and attention, it would be easy for her to take it from anyone who offered.

Years later, I met this young girl again. She looked stunning and was pursuing work as a model. As we chatted, I watched her carefully. She still seemed fragile, like a child who continued to yearn for the love and approval her mother refused to give.

Today, I sometimes think about this young girl and wonder what happened to her. My talk with Kenya Moore made me think of her again. Parents have the power to do such harm to their kids, or they can help forge the powerful self-esteem and self-confidence their children need to help overcome future challenges.

Please, really give some thought to how you've been treating your kids lately.

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