

KNOWING ME KNOWING THEM



**UNDERSTAND YOUR
PARENTING PERSONALITY**
by discovering the Enneagram

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Step Three

Unlock your child's potential



The nine keys to unlocking your child's potential

Every child is born with their own unique temperament – an aspect of their personality that was genetically coded from conception. As they interact with their environment and their nurturing and protective figures – particularly their parents, in most cases – a child's whole personality develops. Eventually, somewhere between the ages of 10 and 15, the



child's dominant Enneagram type is set and does not change. However, this does not mean that their responses to the world and their behaviours are 'locked in'. These will vary through life, depending on a combination of their level of stress and their level of self-mastery (i.e. their ability to respond to that stress). As we described in Step One, when a person (a child, teenager or adult) is subjected to stress but does not have the self-awareness or self-mastery to identify and deal with that stress, they will often display undesirable behaviours that disconnect them from a sense of wellbeing.

To support and guide our children into flourishing young adults we need to address the complex system that is the human being and help them build self-awareness and self-mastery. This could, of course, be the subject of another complete book. But rather than make this too complex, we will introduce you to the nine keys that will unlock your child's potential. While each of the keys is associated with one of the nine Enneagram types, they can be broadly applied. They are universal principles that, when present and operating, greatly contribute to a child's ability to survive and thrive in their world. Each of the nine keys is necessary in the development of the 'whole' child. Developing and nurturing all the nine keys will assist your children in flourishing, that is, achieving the highest level of happiness and wellbeing.

Parenting is a multifaceted job. It is probably one of the most challenging yet most rewarding jobs you will ever have. We believe these are the nine fundamental areas you can work on as a parent that will support your child's growth, development, happiness and wellbeing.



How to use the nine keys

Over the years, as we have developed our parent-coaching businesses, we have designed and refined the nine keys to be a simple yet effective action plan for parents. As you read through the keys you will discover there are practices to enhance each key within your children. Within each key there are activities created for you, the parent, to practise and put into action over a period of time. We suggest that you start at the first key and slowly make your way through all nine in order. Take time to pause every couple of weeks or so, noting how you are doing and how your children are responding.

In most instances this is about you, the parent, trying on a new way of being to support the flourishing of your children. It is about what you are doing 'with' yourself and your children – not what you are doing 'to' your children.

You can start to experiment with the nine keys immediately. Even if you are still working out your Enneagram parenting personality, these keys will provide you with new ways to build connected relationships with your children.

How you practise these will depend greatly on the age of your children, your family's lifestyle and, of course, your personality. Take a fluid approach, practise with each key and observe what happens. Enjoy creating some new habits within your family.



Key 1: Develop mutual respect

The word respect can be defined as “to treat with special consideration or high regard” (see Sterling 2008, p.51). Notice that the word *deserve* does not appear in the definition. Everyone is born worthy of respect; it is something that all people need and want. Acknowledging respect for someone is an affirmation of their being. We can communicate respect to our children in many different ways. Respect comes across in our words, our body language and our attentiveness (see Key 2 below). Unfortunately in today’s society many adults believe they must be respected simply because they are adults. The key here is that respect is mutual. If you show respect for another then they will show respect for you.

Practices to enhance this key:

- a. Strengths spotting: Create a list of the strengths or qualities you respect or admire in your children. Putting accomplishments aside, what particular strengths do you respect them for? When you are with your children, start using words that describe these strengths or qualities, with less focus on the actual achievement and more on the strength or quality.
- b. Shift your attention to something that your children have done well and think about the strength or quality they used. Then consciously set out to tell them, at least once a day over the next few weeks, how you respect, admire or value that strength in them. At the end of each day, sit quietly and ask yourself how you



used the word 'respect' in relation to their strength today and what was the result, for both you and your children.

- c. Encourage discussion in your family around principles, fairness and justice, and a respect for order.

Key 2: Nurture deep listening

The definition of listening is, "to make a conscious effort to hear; to attend to closely, so as to hear". We can show our children that we are hearing what they are saying by actively listening to them and not just passively responding. The attention needs to be on the child and what they are saying, rather than on us trying to give them advice. They are actually working things out for themselves by talking them out. As they feel heard and understood, mutual respect is developed and they will feel loved, appreciated and safe in sharing what is important to them. This also helps them feel connected to you and develops a warm and trusting relationship. In turn, your children will learn to listen more deeply and attentively to others and show care to them – an important life skill.

Practices to enhance this key:

- a. Listen to your children when they open up, without trying to solve their problems. Allow them to talk without interrupting them and practise listening to what they are saying without criticism or judgement. "Listen with your lips shut."
- b. Whenever possible, stop whatever you are doing when



your children want to talk to you. Offer them your full, undivided attention and practise listening to really understand what they are saying from their point of view.

- c. Set some time aside from your busy schedule so you can be available to spend some time with your children without distraction. You may need to turn off your mobile phone and other devices! Offer to help with homework or just have a conversation. Again, concentrate on listening to understand, rather than to fix or solve a problem. It is often in their speaking out that a child is able to process whatever is on their mind.

Key 3: Realise their full potential

Many school mottos have messages around striving for personal best. For a child to discover their talents and reach their potential, they first need to feel good about themselves and have high self-esteem. Encouraging your children to improve their skills is a healthy, natural component of parenting. However, it can be overdone, with encouragement becoming, in the child's eyes, nagging, pushing and driving too hard. Always be aware of whether or not you are striking the right balance.

Practices to enhance this key:

- a. Talk to your children about goals. Help them to imagine new possibilities. Get them to visualise the way things might be and how they would feel if they reached a



- goal. Support them in the way that *they* need. Avoid mapping out your children's life for them – that creates dependency or resentment and it doesn't take into account their unique hopes and dreams for life. Open up regular conversations about the future and how they imagine it.
- b. Work on making your children feel good about themselves. Start to shift your pride away from yourself and onto your child. Replace "I'm so proud of you for getting an A" with "I respect the hard work you put in to get that grade". Use the strengths you identified in Key 1 above. Find a way to acknowledge all the contributions your children make to your family in this way.
 - c. Encourage your children to explore and get creative about their talents. Acknowledge their interests, especially when they are different from yours. Be open and flexible as they try new things. Provide them with opportunities to demonstrate what they can do by using their strengths.

Thank you for your interest and desire to learn more about how to support your child's overall development.

To see the whole chapter and learn more strategies and tips relative to your Enneagram Type please purchase the book through Amazon on your desired bookstore.