

# Parents key in forming child's self-esteem

By Casey Hans  
staff writer

Even before they're toddling, children are absorbing their environment and learning what kind of a person they can be.

When a child enters school, formation of self concept is well under way. They also discover how to get what they want, according to educator Raymond Maloney.

"Their diapers come with a little manual that tells them how to manipulate their parents. They learn it from day one," Maloney told a group of 150 parents of Farmington-area middle school students last week.

Maloney discussed the link between how children develop their self-esteem and success in school.

Especially at the middle school level, "the kids are having a struggle... trying to be accepted into the new setting," he said. "While energy is going into clothes and friends, it's not going into academics. You only have so much energy."

Developing self-esteem is a "life-long project," as Maloney can personally attest. Director of the Self-Esteem Center in Birmingham and former school administrator, Maloney is a self-proclaimed "recovered perfectionist." He started "major repair work" on his own self-esteem at age 40.

WHETHER A person's self-esteem is good or bad, Maloney said it is "highly contagious."

"Self-esteem starts with your self-concept," he said. "It comes to you from all the people outside of you all your life. We can decide we're a

wonderful person, or maybe we're not so great."

Maloney gave a four-part self-esteem checklist that can work for any age. It involves having a sense of belonging, an awareness of being special, taking charge of your life and having a sense of your own values and goals.

"If you want to do a repair job, it's not like your car," he added. "It's actually easier to fix."

The sense of belonging involves being comfortable with ourselves, so children can feel the same. "If we don't like ourselves, we're not going to like other people either," he said.

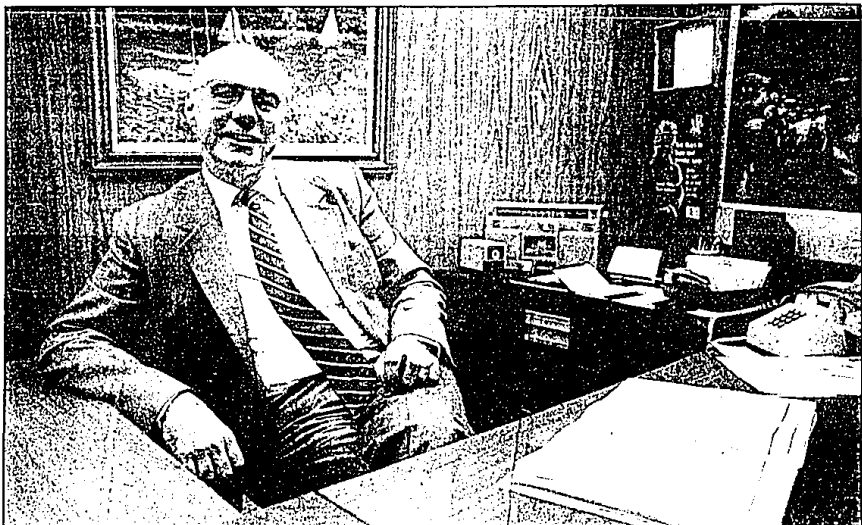
THE SECOND point involves special gifts each person has within. Parents need to identify their own gifts and help children find theirs. "Every one of us has our own, special, unique gifts," he added.

Maloney said if a child does not develop these gifts and succeed, he will find another way to succeed through vandalism, smoking, sex or another form of peer pressure.

Taking charge of life includes being responsible. "It's very hard for people to say 'I'm responsible for me,'" he said. "But that's very related to making decisions. And learning from our mistakes is so important."

He suggests parents begin teaching responsibility and decision-making at an early age. Let a 4-year-old make a sandwich and clean up the kitchen. Let them pick out clothing.

"We're not going to always be happy with their decisions," he said. "So you need to start with the little things. We need to help them sort out that the world is not only black and white."



STEPHEN CANTRELL/staff photographer

Raymond Maloney, director of the Self-Esteem Center in Birmingham and former school administrator, is a self-proclaimed

"recovered perfectionist." He started "major repair work" on his own self-esteem at age 40.

## Aid sought from many for needy

Local activist Darlene Feldman is encouraging churches, scout troops and other community groups to "adopt-a-precinct" to help urban police departments who must deal with the homeless.

Farmington Hills Harrison High School is one of the first groups to become involved by holding a blanket drive, she said. "It has spread beyond Detroit," said Feldman, a Farmington Hills resident who recently started Operation Cover-up — an effort to "bring blankets to Detroit's homeless during the recent sub-zero weather."

Other cities, including Pontiac and Highland Park, are also in need and are benefitting from the community efforts.

The donation of blankets and boots and shoes "is helping people and saving lives in ways we didn't even think of," said Feldman.

POLICE OFFICERS are using the blankets not only for the homeless, but at the scenes of accidents where victims run the risk of going into shock, she said.

"I sincerely want to set this up... as something that will continue," she added.

Any group interested in "adopting a precinct" should call 851-9027.

OF ALL these, Maloney calls goal setting "the magic secret of success." But goals must be what the child wants, not what the parents want. "They're going through the process of separating from you," he told the parents.

The basis for all successful "change" programs is communication, stresses Maloney.

He gives a three-point formula for starting discussions between parents and children.

Parents should ask a child three questions:

- how do you feel about what you did?
- would you do anything different if you could?
- how can I help you?

These discussion-starters will help children form their own opinions and take responsibility for their own actions, Maloney said. "You have to lead them to see it themselves. We know the answers, but it has to come from them."

When parents make decisions for their children, "we're leading them astray," he added.

## Program helps underachievers

By Casey Hans  
staff writer

A pilot education program in Farmington is addressing self-esteem problems in youngsters — an issue affecting students in all grade levels.

"Some youngsters underachieve because of messages they get at home. They reinforce these behaviors," said Jerry Kaplan, gifted coordinator for Farmington Middle Schools, who spoke recently to a group of about 150 parents.

"They simply don't believe they're smart — they've underachieved for such a long period of time."

"It's obvious from the turnout tonight, it's a major concern. It's a universal kind of problem."

HELPING a student with self-esteem takes efforts from all areas, including school and home, Kaplan said.

"The schools, parent and coun-

sellers are all involved in reversing the process," he said. "I don't think there is any magic in the cures. The responsibility is all of ours. It can best be handled if we work together."

The Farmington pilot program is a small one, involving 13 students at different schools. Each has a history of poor performance in school and self-esteem problems, Kaplan said.

Addressing the areas of communication, responsibility, respect and control, a team involving parents, counselors, coordinators, social workers, psychologists and teachers works with each student to raise the self-esteem. The concepts developed by Sylvia Rimm are being used, he said.

INFORMATION ABOUT the student is reviewed by Rimm's group, and returned so a plan can be determined for each student, Kaplan said. The process is expected to take the rest of the school year.

Although students involved with the pilot are in the school's gifted program, Kaplan said future plans include involvement throughout the student population.

"We hope we're on the right track," he said. "If we're successful, we hope to open the Rimm scale up to a larger audience. I would envision we would slowly add to this group, rather than simply open the doors."

"We're interested in expanding this to all students. There are a lot of children who need this service."

PARENTS commented about teachers with self-esteem problems

in the classroom, the rebellion of children toward overachieving parents and the need for a more far-reaching program for students in the future.

Kaplan's comments preceded guest speaker Raymond Maloney, director of the Self-Esteem Center in Birmingham, who spoke to parents at East Middle School last week.

The evening was sponsored by the Farmington Middle School Committee in cooperation with the Farmington Board of Education. It was held mainly for parents with children in the fifth grade and middle school grades.

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