

## INITIATIVE VERSUS GUILT

According to Eriksons' theory, the child has gone through the stages of trust versus mistrust and autonomy versus shame and doubt. The preschooler now enters the stage of initiative versus guilt.

Because preschool-age children are developing new abilities and have a great deal of energy, they begin to engage in many new activities. This is all part of what initiative means. It is the act of the child trying things on his/her own. The child initiates the behavior and does not have to be coaxed. If the child gains a sense of initiative during the preschool years, he/she is likely to become ambitious and have an individual sense and purpose in life.

The feeling of guilt comes when the child experiences too many failures and too many rules and restrictions from adults. This causes them to be fearful of trying new things. It prevents them from initiating behavior. It leads to a feeling that the child is wrong and a feeling of blame. The world appears black and white, and if the child makes a mistake, he/she translates that to mean "I am bad." Instead, children need to recognize that everyone makes mistakes and that mistakes do not make you a bad person. Adults need to understand that children do not learn the first time they perform a task. Rules must be stated many times before the child comprehends what you are trying to teach.

This concept concerning people making mistakes is vital in helping a child achieve the sense of initiative. Because children usually define themselves in terms of what they can do, they want to find out what they can do and, therefore, initiate many activities and explore their curiosity. They do many things on impulse without thinking of the consequences. Hence, they go beyond their abilities and make mistakes. At these times, adults should help the child learn from their mistake or what it was they did wrong or incorrectly. This should be done in a loving, caring, helpful, and positive way. Remember, a mistake means a miss take. That means you have the opportunity of trying the task again.

Read the following situations to the students. These stories involve preschool-age children who are trying to gain a sense of initiative and somehow fall short due to a lack of ability or knowledge. Have the students discuss how a parent or caregiver should respond.

#1

Mike runs out of the preschool room door and dashes to the slide. He yells to his friend, Dave, "Watch me!" Mike quickly climbs the ladder, lies on his stomach, and give himself a push. He slips down the slide yelling "Geronimo!" Mike crashes head first into the sand at the bottom of the slide and begins to cry.

#2

Ben was excited; he had just watered the flowers for his mother! He had done such a good job and was pleased with himself. He made sure every flower had a drink. He was sure his mother would not mind that he entered the house before removing the clumps of mud from his shoes.

#3

Melissa loved to help her mother around the house. She decided it was time to wash the sliding glass door. She went and got the window cleaner. The rag to wash the window with was not there, so she just picked up a cloth laying on the floor by the washer. The window was really dirty, and the white rag kept getting more and more dirty, but the window looked great! Just then she heard Mother ask, "Has anyone seen my blouse? I laid it on the floor by the washer."

#4

Steven had just finished cleaning his room. His mother had told him not to leave anything on the floor. He made sure the floor was spotless. How do you think his mother reacted when she entered the room and found that he had piled everything on the top bunk bed?