

“I am; I can; I ought; I will”

The Charlotte Mason Children’s Motto

The Children in the P.N.E.U. (Parents National Education Union) schools founded by Charlotte Mason (CM) wore buttons on their lapels with this motto imprinted--a reminder of what they were striving for in their lives and in their education. The following is just one mom’s interpretation of how to apply this motto in the lives of children.

“I am” = the child’s identity (the Foundation)

“I am a child of God---I am an important and unique human being.” We as their parents and teachers must communicate to them that they are lovable; that we love them and especially that God loves them. Their personal identity and sense of worthiness (self-esteem) needs to be based on who they are in Christ (Christ-esteem).

“I can” = abilities

“I have abilities that God has given me which make me capable of accomplishing the things He has called me to do.” We need to communicate to our children that they are capable--that they can “do all things through Christ Who strengthens” them.

“I ought” = the moral conscience

“I ought to do what is right.” It’s a sense of duty---a sense of right and wrong. The conscience can be seared (or numbed or silenced) by continual wrong thinking and wrong doing. We as parents must step in and help form habits of proper actions and right thinking in our children. A good “living” book to read and narrate with your children on this topic is the book of Proverbs in the Old Testament.

“I will” = the power to act

“I will forget myself and do what is right.” After realizing their infinite worth, their God-given capabilities, and the right actions God desires from them, our children need to be assured that they can “will” themselves (through the power of the Holy Spirit) to do what needs to be done. Sometimes right actions will require courage---they can “will” themselves to be courageous.

God has created and called us to this life; He has equipped us for every good work; He has given us a moral conscience to know right from wrong; and He has enabled us to choose to follow through with the appropriate actions.