

Your Child's Self Esteem

Our self esteem is composed of the thoughts, the feelings, and the ideas we have about ourselves. It is our overall judgement of how much we like, accept, and respect ourselves. Most of the things a child or adult does is directly related to self esteem. The friends we choose, how we relate to others, the type person we marry, our creativity, our achievements, our basic personality are all affected by our concept of our "self." Strong self-esteem is not only the foundation of sound mental health, but is a key ingredient in charting the course for a successful and happy life. Building a good self image in our children may be the single greatest challenge of parenthood, but it's well worth the effort!

How do we know if our child has healthy self esteem? We can observe their behavior.

Positive Self Esteem Includes:	Observable behaviors of a child with high self esteem:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (Ability for personal growth (An increasing openness to new experiences (Trust in yourself (Personal depth (Consideration for others (Feeling loveable, capable, and confident (Accepting our weaknesses (Knowing and acknowledging our strengths (Flexibility and openness to change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (Acts independently (Assumes responsibility (for his age) (Tolerates frustration (Enjoys new challenges (Has a broad range of emotions (Makes friends easily (Generally happy and pleasant

Negative Self Esteem Includes:	Observable behaviors of a child with low self esteem:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ; Lack of self-confidence ; Super-sensitive to criticism ; Blaming others ; Unhappy relationships ; Defensive/frustrated behavior ; Difficulty making and keeping friends ; Generally unhappy with self 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ; Avoids situations that cause anxiety ; Puts self down ; Is easily influenced by others ; Has a hard time making decisions ; Loses motivation and interest easily ; Does poorly in school ; Withdrawn and often alone ; Aggressive towards other children

For children older than four years old. Every child displays some of these behaviors from time to time. Many of these behaviors are typical of ages and stages that a child passes through. What we want to be concerned about, as parents, is the overall consistency in a child's behavior. Look for a change in your child or a large number of these behaviors at any one time.

Building Your Child's Self Esteem

Parents often ask themselves: "What can I do to help my child feel better about himself . . . to feel more confident . . . to view life positively?" The answer, of course, is not a simple one, but it involves building your child's self esteem. It is widely recognized that high self esteem is critical to a child's (and adult's) happiness and well-being in life. Let's look at some of the important techniques that parents can use to build feelings of self worth in children.

1. **Check your own feelings of self-worth.**

Parents must feel secure and good about themselves to be successful in creating a home atmosphere where children feel loved and valued.

2. **Look at your child as a unique person.**

When a child feels he is accepted for his unique qualities, his sense of well being grows. Each child has something different and special to bring to the family - - appreciate those differences.

3. **Give each child some individual attention.**

Taking time to focus full and undivided attention on your child is a quality that conveys love by saying: "I care" and "I have time for you." Take turns spending one-on-one time with each child.

4. **Be positive and honest with your child.**

Answer your child's questions as honestly as you can. If you are open and truthful while your child is young, he will continue to communicate with you when he is a teenager.

5. **Avoid being a judge.** How we respond to children and their behaviors and how we express our feeling about them are critical factors in building up or tearing down their self image. Avoid name-calling. A child may take his time getting dressed, but he's not a "slow poke".

6. **Be realistic in your expectations.** When expectations of a child are based on his age, his particular personality and the current circumstances in which he is operating, he can more easily experience success and enjoy his accomplishments.

7. **Allow your child to make choices and decisions.** Children like a little power, and they

are usually better behaved when they do have a say in some matters. Encourage his independence by giving him and letting him make some decisions.

8. **Give your child responsibility.** Be sure you give responsibility that he is capable of. Know enough about child development to know what is reasonable. Responsibility includes helping out with household chores and taking care of their personal care. The older your child, the more responsibility he or she can handle.

9. **Use kind words.** Kind words are very important in helping a child to feel good about himself. Keep your words positive and soft, smile often at your children and enjoy them. Remember that teenagers need kind words, also.

10. **Accept your child.** Communicate acceptance to your child by affirming and supporting her. Let her know she is special.

11. **Use good physical contact.** Good physical contact includes hugs, a pat on the back, a close cuddle when reading a book or watching TV, holding their hand, etc.

12. **Don't do everything for your child.** Your child needs to experience success on his own. If children are not given the opportunity to succeed, they will never know how good success feels. Build confidence in your child by saying: "I know you can do it". Doing things for your child may be sending him the message that he's not a capable person.

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