

Kids and Self-Esteem: Tips on Raising a Confident Child

Experts agree that building a child's self-esteem is one important way to lay a healthy foundation for a happy and productive future. But what exactly is self-esteem, and how do you help your child develop it?

What psychologists call self-esteem is a combination of self-confidence and self-respect. According to leading child development experts, two ingredients are essential to developing self-esteem: freedom and encouragement.

A child who is free to experiment, to fail, and to try again develops a sense of his or her own accomplishments. If a parent gives too much help, the child does not get to "own" that sense of accomplishment. Eventually, a child may lose some sense of curiosity and become passive.

When creating a nurturing environment for your children, keep in mind that they are not simply little adults. Children tend to be impulsive and self-centered and to think in simple terms. If you expect them to think or behave like adults, you will be setting them up to fail.

The Five Principles

In their guide for parents and teachers, *Self-Esteem for Tots to Teens*, educators Eugene Anderson, George Redman, and Charlotte Rogers offer these five principles for building self-esteem in children:

1. Listen to and acknowledge your child's thoughts and feelings. By giving your child your full attention when talking and then paraphrasing his or her thoughts, you show the child counts.
2. Create situations that help your child experience success, not failure. Set clear and appropriate expectations, offer a reasonable amount of help, provide adequate incentives, and remove obstacles.
3. Give your child a feeling of reasonable control over his or her life. Having too little control over his or her environment can make your child feel inadequate; having too much control can make your child feel neglected and insecure.
4. Reinforce that your child is lovable and capable. Praise a child for what he or she does, reward successes, and express to your child when you are proud of him or her.
5. Show your child that you have a positive view of yourself. Children can "catch" self-esteem from adults. Let your child hear you talk about yourself in positive terms. Let your child see you react to circumstances in your life in a positive way.

One final thought: be careful to balance praise and criticism. A certain amount of praise will reinforce your child's sense of her own success, but too much praise can sound more like pressure than encouragement. Likewise, too much criticism can rob your child of energy to solve problems.