



RAISING CONFIDENT KIDS

Building Self-Esteem in Children through *ENCOURAGEMENT*

Children are often compared to sponges, in that they absorb and learn about the world around them through interactions with others, particularly those in caregiving roles. As an adult figure or caregiver in a child's life, your interactions with a child may help to foster their personal growth and a sense of self.

Self-esteem can be thought of as a lot of interconnected factors that lead to an individual's inner confidence and self-identity. As an adult or caregiver, you can help to promote positive self-esteem growth in a child through celebrating differences, fostering open communication, and showing that you love and appreciate one another.

One way that you can foster positive self-esteem growth during childhood is through effectively encouraging a child for their exploration or achievements. Effective praise names the action that is the reason for your praise and helps the child better understand what it is that they did well.

Effective encouragement focuses on the action and effort instead of just achievement thereby helping the child see that you recognize him for his effort and commitment, not just the end result.

An example of effective encouragement would be, "WOW, you are always continuing to try

new ways to build your tower even after it fell over. I bet that was hard to not just give up." Recognizing the exact behavior or reasons you want to encourage gives children "courage" to keep trying even if they are not the best or first at something. This also encourages children to feel better about themselves by clearly encouraging their efforts and building the belief that through hard work they may achieve or build upon a skill. Taking the time to think about how you talk to a child and making small changes like using more encouragement can help to build self-esteem in children and foster healthy social and emotional development.

4 TIPS TO BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM IN CHILDREN

Parents want their children to have good self-esteem. However, self-esteem doesn't come naturally to children. It is something that must be fostered, developed, nurtured, and grown. Following these four tips can help.

1 SHOW YOUR CHILDREN THAT YOU VALUE THEM. Let your children know you love them. This is done through direct expressions of love, hugs, and kisses. Children need to be told directly by their parents or caregiver that they are loved. Children need to be held, cuddled, and played with. Quality and quantity of time demonstrate that parents value their children. Few things speak more to a child about being valued than his or her parents simply being present and focused on them.

2 TEACH YOUR CHILDREN AND LET THEM LEARN. Competency is the next ingredient to healthy self-esteem. As the child grows and begins exploring the house (often the kitchen cupboards), the child gains the opportunity to increase competency. He or she does this by gaining access and control over larger objects and greater spaces. Again, the response of the parent is crucial. Some parents structure the child's environment for maximum exploration, while other parents localize their child's area of living. Either way helps them.

3 PARTICIPATE IN DOING GOOD DEEDS. The third thing parents can do to facilitate healthy self-esteem in their children is to direct and participate with their children in doing good deeds. Doing good deeds teaches children to be aware of the life of others beyond themselves. This enables the development of empathy and altruistic behavior. What's important is that children are encouraged, or even positioned, to be helpful to the extent of their ability. The little one may carry a plastic cup to the table, the middle one a plate and a spoon, while the big one can clear the

table. Special little projects can be undertaken, visits can be made, and pennies can be put in the charity coin boxes at store checkout counters.

4 MAKE THE RULES OF LIFE CLEAR. Children deserve to know the rules and the consequences. This helps a child feel more empowered and respected. For example:

Rule: Toys need to be put away before bedtime.

Consequence: Toys that are not put away, will be taken away for a pre-planned period of time. For a preschooler, the time period may be just an hour or the next day but for an older child it may be for a day or two. The time can be extended if the rule continues to be ignored but the time extension should be pre-planned and the child should know what that time extension will be ahead of time as well. "If the toys are left out again, they will be unavailable to be played with for two days." The key is that children should know ahead of time what the rules and consequences are and that the consequences are the three "R's"—reasonable, respectful and related wherever possible. Reasonable is related to the timeframe and age of the child, respectful is all about the delivery—parents don't need to yell or belittle—they just need to follow thru. Related is vital as well—it needs to make sense to the child. For instance, telling the child he can't go to the zoo next week because he didn't clean up his toys is not related and it is also not reasonable.