

FOSTERING SELF ESTEEM DISCUSSION

All children are born believing they are the center of the universe. They do not worry too much about what anyone else thinks. (You do not see babies noticing whether other babies are crying before they decide to cry. Do babies check to see whether other babies are wearing name brand or generic brand diapers?)

However, within the first few years, children perceive how the most important people in their lives (their parents) see them. Their image of themselves becomes a reflection of their parents' image of them. They then behave the way they see themselves and become whatever that image is. A parent who thinks children are brats treats a child as though he/she is a brat. The child believes he/she is a brat, and acts like a brat, therefore, becomes a brat! A parent who thinks a child is wonderful, treats, him/her like he/she is wonderful. The child believes he/she is wonderful, and becomes wonderful!

There is a self-fulfilling prophecy. It states that you become what you think you are. Whether you think you can or whether you think you can not, you are right!

As long as you do not give your child the impression that he/she is better than others, but every bit as good, you cannot give your child too much confidence. Giving your child that precious sense of personal worth gives him/her the ability to survive the hazards and hurts of growing up. The gift of self-esteem is the best thing you can ever give your child.

How do you help your child build self-esteem? Self-confidence is built gradually; a collection of positive experiences.

1. Provide more successes than failures for the child.

- * Plan successes. Give the children many things to do that they can do well (books they can read, games they can play, clothing they can put on by themselves).
- * When there are many failures, help the child back up to a point where success is achieved, then move on more gradually. (For example, if Johnny is having trouble tying his shoes, get him some slip-on shoes that he until it's easier for him to learn to tie.)
- * Help the child perceive herself as successful. (Even though Joan did not score a goal in the soccer game, point out how well she ran to keep up with the ball and move it in the right direction.)
- * Provide practice for what the child can do. You may wish to provide lessons to improve skills.

2. Give the freedom to fail with acceptance.

- * As long as there are more successes than failures, children learn not to let a few failures get them down. They will learn to simply try again.
- * A child who is over-protected and not allowed to fail will learn to try only if success is guaranteed. (Do not help Tim get dressed every time. If he lets his shirt on backwards, show him how to put it on correctly and let him keep trying until he can do it.)

3. Give lots of encouragement.

- * Recognize the effort and improvement, not just the final accomplishment.
"I know you can do it."
"You handled that really well."
"It's coming right along."

"You will make it next time."

- * Show appreciation. "Thanks, you were a big help."

4. Give unconditional love.

- * Let the child know that even when you are mad at her, even when you do not approve of her behavior, she is still greatly loved.
- * Accept children as they are, not as they could be.
- * Respect your child.
- * Show them how much you care about them. Hug them, tell them they are terrific. Tell them you love them.

5. Allow independence.

- * If a child can do it for himself, let him.
- * Don't interfere when a child is working through a problem. It gives the message that you do not believe he can do it. Give suggestions and help only when help is wanted.
- * Give him/her choices to make as early and as much as possible. Let a toddler decide what he wants for lunch. "Do you want soup or a sandwich today?" Caution: do not offer choices if you do not plan to honor the choice. Do not say, "What do you want to wear to church?" then not let her wear the swimsuit and thongs she picks out; this injures her self-confidence. Instead say, "Do you want to wear your blue dress or your green dress?"

6. Eliminate the negative.

- * Tell children what they can do, not what they cannot do. "Instead of finger painting on the table, put some newspapers under your picture."
- * Catch your child doing something good more often than when he's doing something wrong. Children naturally want to do the things for which they get recognition.

7. Do not set standards unreasonably high.

- * Her room does not need to be cleaned perfectly, he does not have to win every game, she does not need to get 100% on all her spelling tests.
Know your child's abilities and let him work within them.
- * Children are not miniature adults. They have to start out sloppy in order to learn to be neat, slow in order to be fast, unskilled in order to be skilled.
- * Make sure you are not overestimating her maturity.

8. Avoid ridicule.

- * Avoid cute, but degrading nicknames like grinner or shorty and labels like lazy, clumsy, or hellion.
- * Do not make fun of children, especially in front of others.

9. Allow exploration and encourage questions.

- * Instead of keeping infants in playpens all day, let them crawl, explore, and find out about their world so that they feel comfortable in it (with adequate supervision, of course).
- * Give toddlers a chance to feel their food, to find out what happens when rocks are dropped in water, to push a toy car down a ramp, etc.

10. Set limits.

- * Let the child know what the limits are and let him feel secure that you will not let him go too far.

11. Help your child develop talents. (Her own talents, not the ones you wish she had).

- * Every child needs to feel that she is good at something, whether it is music, soccer, painting, leadership, dog training, rock collecting, or any other positive interest your child has. Give her encouragement, books to read, lessons, and many opportunities.

12. Take their ideas, emotions and feelings seriously.

- * Do not belittle them by saying, "Oh, that is nothing to cry about," "That is no big deal," or "You will get over it."

13. Be a good role model.

- * Improve your own self-image and let your children see that you value and feel good about yourself.
- * Let your children see you make mistakes, learn from them, and try again.

14. Give your children responsibility

- * Give children chores that are appropriate to their ages. Two-year-olds can help set the table, put away their toys, and put dirty clothes in the hamper. A ten-year-old can wash the car, baby-sit, and pack his own suitcase.
- * Each child should have a family job at least once a day. Children feel useful and valued when they are contributing to the family's welfare. Rather than "do it so you will learn responsibility," say, "we need your help to get things running smoothly around here."

15. Be available.

- * Give children support when they need it.
- * Spend time together, talking and sharing activities you both enjoy, working together.