

## Self-Esteem Grows With Realistic Expectations

*Our children's self-esteem often depends on how they think they "measure up" to what people expect.*

When expectations are realistic, it is easy for a child to experience success and feel personally valuable. On the other hand, when expectations are too high or too rigid, parents often express disappointment in their child's actions. As disappointments mount up, they begin to eat away at a child's view of his own value and his self-esteem begins to diminish.



*How do I know if my expectations are realistic?*

Start by checking your expectations with the basic facts of child development. Learn in a general way what children of a certain age are like. Learn about your child's current stage of development. By comparing your expectations with these general facts, try to determine if your goals are generally within reason. Then, recognizing that no child is "in general" or "average," check to see that you have adjusted your expectations to suit the needs, interests and environment of your child.

- Are you setting appropriate standards of achievement?
- Does your child understand how you want her to behave?
- Do you have realistic, clear rules for behavior?
- Does your child understand the rules?

*Run a Check on Your Current Expectations*

Ask yourself these questions.

- Why do I have this expectation?
- Where did it come from?
- Is it based on my wishes or my child's needs?
- Does it realistically fit this particular child...at this age...with her temperament and background?
- What purpose does it serve?
- Am I being fair?

Weed out the expectations that have no meaning for your child at his or her stage of development.

*Your child's self-esteem: Its importance*

Like most parents, we want to help our children achieve the goals and dreams which we have for them — and which they have for themselves. If a child has high self-esteem, her chances of attaining her goals in life are increased. Let's consider more closely, then, the why and how of self-esteem... Why is self-esteem so important? How can parents assess children's feelings about themselves?

*Exactly what is self-esteem? Is it really so important?*

In simple words, self-esteem is composed of the thoughts, the feelings, and the ideas that a person has about himself. It is his overall judgment of himself. It is how much he likes, accepts and respects himself. In one way or another most of the things a child or an adult does are directly related to his feelings about himself. The friends he chooses, his creativity, his achievement, his basic personality — all are affected by his concept of himself.



Strong self-esteem is not only the foundation of sound mental health, but it is also important in charting a successful and happy life. Building a good self image in our children is one of the most important jobs we do as parents.

*Self-esteem is learned. It can be changed.*

We are not born with high or low self-esteem. Instead our feelings about ourselves are learned from birth and continue over our lifetime. Our feelings are constantly revised upward or downward throughout life by the results of each additional experience.

High self-esteem is possible for any person. It is not linked to a family's wealth, education, social class, having mom at home, or to dad's occupation. What is important is the quality of the relationship that exists between a child and those who are important in her life.

## **Characteristic Behaviors of Children and Youth With High and Low Self-Esteem**

### *High Self-Esteem*

- Makes friends with other children easily.
- Shows enthusiasm for new activities.
- Is cooperative and can usually follow reasonable rules.
- Largely responsible for control of own actions.
- Is creative, imaginative and has ideas of his own.
- Is happy, energetic; talks freely.
- Is independent, self-assured.
- Displays achievement consistent with ability.



### *Low Self-Esteem*

- May be reluctant to enter new situations or try new activities.
- May easily become frustrated, angry or break out in tears.
- May withdraw or become overly aggressive to parents or other children.
- May do most things alone or cling to one friend.
- May be possessive of objects and make excessive demands on adult's time.



- Behavior does not suggest he is a happy child.
- May be reluctant to enter into activities that involve close personal contact.
- Regularly achieves at lower levels than “ability.”



**1. Be specific in your praise.**

Have you ever gotten tired of saying “Great job,” or “That’s neat!”? After a while, these stock phrases become overused and don’t convey our enthusiasm very well.

Focus on a specific thing you appreciate about the child’s effort. For example, you might say “You worked hard to get that assignment done,” or “Your writing is getting neat!” Not only will your comments sound more sincere, you will help the child better understand what you appreciate about his or her performance.

**2. Focus on effort rather than the product.**

Rather than wait until Mark cleans his whole room, comment on how well he is progressing. For example, you might say “Mark, your room looks so much better since you’ve started hanging up your clothes.”

**3. Match your verbal and non- verbal messages of praise.**

A quick “That’s great, Ann” as you start putting the dishes away is not likely to be interpreted as praise by a child. Children are more likely to believe your praise if you give them your undivided attention.



**4. Praise in private.**

This tells a child “I’m special” without embarrassing the child. It also avoids competition with other children.

**5. Be careful of exaggerations.**

“You’re the fastest runner in the whole world” may be offered with pride. But it is unlikely to be true. Saying “You ran faster today than you did yesterday” is both truthful and helpful.

**6. Avoid comparing children.**

“Jenny got her chores done the fastest” suggests that only Jenny did a good job. Instead you might say “I’m glad you all got your chores done.”

**7. Avoid combining praise and constructive criticism.**

If you notice a child has not been careful in folding his clothes, ask him to do a similar task another time. Before starting the task, show him how to neatly fold clothes and put them away.

**8. Encourage children to be the final judge of their work.**

By helping children decide for themselves if they achieved their goals, you will encourage them to think for themselves. This will also avoid making them dependent on others for praise.

*Feeling good about yourself is important.*

By focusing on what children do right, and by paying attention to how we praise children, we are more likely to promote positive self- esteem.

Have a good month!

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