

## Steps To Building Self Esteem

At one time or another most parents 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. Positive self-esteem is a key to happiness and well-being in life. Let's look at some of the important techniques that can build a feeling of self worth or high self-esteem in our children.

### **First, check your own feelings of self worth.**

Parents must feel secure and good about themselves before they can help their children reach this same goal. Parents with high self-esteem are most successful in creating homes where communication and family routines help children feel loved and important for their own special talents and qualities.



### **Give each child some undivided attention.**

Taking time to focus full attention on your child is a way to say: "I care," "I have time for you." It means being with your child both physically and mentally. It means taking some time to be completely absorbed with your child.

Constant, intense involvement is not necessary or realistic. The important thing is to let your child know that he can count on this kind of attention at regular intervals. It may be necessary during especially busy periods to set up a definite time for these get-togethers. Special times of stress (during family moves, when a new baby arrives or upon entering school) often require extra periods of quality time with a child.

Respond to and value each child on the basis of her own personal characteristics...not in comparison to brothers, sisters or classmates. When a child feels that she is accepted and valued for the unique qualities she possesses, her sense of well being grows.

### **Be realistic in your expectations.**

When expectations for a child are based on her age, her particular personality and the current circumstances in which she is operating, she can more easily experience success and enjoy a feeling of accomplishment. Repeated successes make a child feel more valuable and help build her self-esteem.

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

Whenever possible, comment honestly and positively about what your child has done. Remember to tell him when he has done a good job.



If you feel that you can't comment honestly, perhaps you can encourage with a general statement such as: "You've worked hard today. I appreciate it!"



Keep in mind that positive responses are conveyed not only by words, but by actions as well. Warm smiles, happy hugs, and pats on the back help a child feel valued.

### **Walk in your child's shoes.**

How we respond to our child and her behavior and how we express our feelings about her are critical factors in building up or tearing down her self image. Parents who learn to react to a situation without being judgmental encourage positive self-esteem. Stop for a moment and consider how you normally respond to your child's behavior. If your statements frequently begin with "you" it is likely that they include both a reaction to her behavior plus a judgment of her.

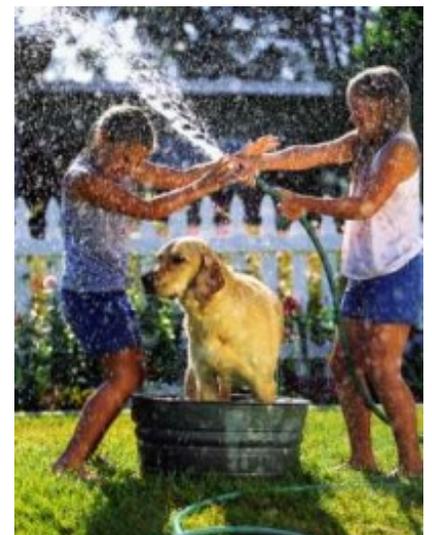
If they begin with "I," you most likely are directing your response to her behavior only. Put yourself in your child's shoes! How would you feel after hearing each of these statements?

<b>Situation</b>	<b>"You" Judgement</b>	<b>"I" Reaction</b>
Your child's report card indicates achievement below your expectations.	"You're lazy"	"I'm worried about your grades."
A car almost hits your child in the street.	"You dope! Don't you know any better than to play in the street?"	"I'm so frustrated. I have repeatedly told you not to play in the street. I'm scared you'll get hurt."
Your child wins an art contest.	"You're such a good boy."	"I'm so proud of you and your drawings because they show how carefully you have been observing nature."

### **Encourage independence.**

**Children build self-confidence when they are permitted to participate in or make choices and decisions.**

- Show respect for your children by allowing them to make decisions—and then respecting their decisions. Start with simple choices (which color of shirt to wear today). Gradually move to more difficult choices (choosing when to go to bed and when to wake up).
- Let children do for themselves what they are capable of doing safely (helping prepare a snack or meal, putting away laundry—even when you can do those things faster).
- Balance your need to protect with your child's need to take risks and test her abilities to meet new challenges.



- Try not to rescue your child from difficult situations. Be available, in case you are needed — but resist the urge to step in unless the situation becomes unsafe. When children work through their own problems, their confidence grows.
- Help children learn the skills that will help them be successful in life
  - Work hard — knowing that failing is a part of learning.
  - Share
  - Manage anger and conflict
  - Manage stress in healthy ways



Have a good month!

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