

# Questions & Answers about helping children build self-esteem

Children's self-esteem is like a group of pictures they carry in their minds of how they see themselves. They start this collection early in life, and parents have a lot to do with how their children see themselves. Children who grow up liking themselves have parents who believe in them and help them grow. These children know that the adults in their lives love and accept them. They grow up liking themselves and looking forward to learning new things as they grow older. While parents cannot *give* their children self-esteem, there are ways that parents can *help* their children develop it.

## 1. When do children begin to develop self-esteem?

Children begin to understand who they are very early in life. Babies quickly learn about themselves by how people respond to them and see them. By about 18 months of age, children are able to understand that they are different than anyone else. Parents and caregivers can help children develop healthy self-esteem by showing them love and support.

## 2. What things do children need to develop healthy self-esteem?

- **Support** from adults who care for them and believe in them;
- **Time to talk** with adults who show interest in what the children are doing, thinking, and feeling;
- **Rules for behavior** that are fairly applied the same way each time and that children can understand;
- **Appreciation** that helps children feel worthy;
- **Ways to deal** with tough times in life, like sharing, controlling anger, solving problems, and dealing with stress; and
- Positive **role modeling** from adults who show children that

they like themselves.

## 3. What can I do to help my child build a healthy self-esteem?

- When your child misbehaves, focus on the behavior, not the child. Let your children know that you love and care about them, no matter what.
- Encourage them with words and hugs.
- Be honest and sincere when praising children for good work by saying, "I like the way you helped me get everything ready for our picnic." Instead of just, "Great job!"
- Let your child know you value him or her as a person. "I love you just the way you are."
- Let children learn who they are, instead of wanting them to be who you think they should be.
- Find ways to help children grow with new experiences.
- Allow children to think and work creatively.
- Let children help do things that they can do safely, such as helping you prepare a meal, folding laundry, and washing the car (even if you can do these things faster and better).
- Listen to your children and show your support of their ideas and concerns.

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- Be a positive model for your kids by showing you have good self-esteem.
- Don't rescue children from every tough time. Be available if they need your help, but let them to work through their own problems. This helps children build self-confidence.
- Balance your need to protect children with their need to take risks and grow.
- Show respect for children by letting them make some choices and supporting their decisions.
- Offer unconditional love and the gift of your time to them.

#### **4. Are there some things that might harm my child's developing self-esteem?**

- Dislike the child's misbehavior, not the child. Let your child know you still love him or her, even though you don't like the crayon drawings on the wall.
- Don't call children names or label them with negative words.
- Don't tease children because they often take it seriously.
- Give compliments without being critical.
- Don't talk about your child when he or she can hear you.
- Don't compare your child to other children; each child is special and should be valued just the way he or she is.
- Don't try to make children into who you think they should be. Help them learn to love who they are.
- Don't wait until your child learns something new or does

something right before you show your love. Children need to hear and feel a parent's love all the time.

#### **5. When my 7-year-old daughter makes a mistake or gets even an average grade in school, she gets very upset with herself.**

##### **How can I help her cope?**

Tell your daughter that every person in the world makes mistakes and that no one is perfect. This does not mean that they are bad people or failures. Help her see that mistakes are her chances to get better at something. When you dislike her behavior, let her know you still love her, even if you don't like her behavior.

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