

Self-esteem is important in children

As parents struggle to fulfill all of their children's basic needs of life, self-esteem may not seem like a basic need. But self-esteem is just as important in a child's life as daily food and cleanliness.

Healthy self-esteem is how we feel about ourselves and how we address daily challenges. Children who feel good about themselves seem to have an easier time handling conflicts and resisting negative pressures, say the experts at KidsHealth.org. They tend to smile more readily and enjoy life. These children are realistic and generally optimistic.

In contrast, children with lower self-esteem are more likely to experience significant anxiety and frustration over challenges of any size. And they have a more difficult time solving problems.

If children think "I'm no good" or "I can't do anything right," they may become passive, withdrawn or depressed. When faced with a new challenge, their immediate response often is "I can't."

Children begin developing self-esteem as babies when they achieve their first accomplishments. Learning to roll over after many tries gives babies one of their first "wow" moments of achievement; you can see the delight and pride on their faces.

As babies develop into toddlers, pre-schoolers and older, they continue to follow the process of first attempt and failure, followed by subsequent attempts and success. With each success comes a reinforcement of their self-esteem.

But all self-esteem isn't garnered by the

child alone; a significant sense of value is learned by the actions and reactions of others – especially parents. Self-esteem has been defined as feelings of capability combined with feelings of being loved.

All children need love and appreciation and thrive on positive attention. Yet, how often do we as parents forget to use words of encouragement such as, "that's right," "wonderful" or "good job"?

Words and actions have great impact on the confidence of children, and children remember positive statements. Parents also can smile, nod, wink, pat on the back or hug a child to show attention and appreciation.

A child who is happy with an achievement but does not feel loved may eventually experience low self-esteem, says KidsHealth. Likewise, a child who feels loved but is hesitant about his or her own abilities can also end up with low self-esteem. Healthy self-esteem comes when the right balance is reached.

How can you gauge your children's self-esteem?

According to experts, children with low self-esteem may not want to try new things and may frequently speak negatively about themselves: "I'm stupid," "I'll never learn how to do this" or "What's the point? Nobody cares about me anyway."

They may exhibit a low tolerance for frustration, giving up easily or waiting for somebody else to take over. They tend to be overly critical of themselves and become easily disappointed in themselves. They see temporary setbacks as permanent, intolerable conditions, and a sense of pessimism sets in.



In addition, children with low self-esteem may blame others for their shortcomings, feel (or pretend to feel) emotionally indifferent, be unable to tolerate a normal level of frustration, put down their own talents and abilities and be easily influenced.

On the other hand, children with healthy self-esteem tend to enjoy interacting with others. They're comfortable in social settings and enjoy group activities as well as independent pursuits. When challenges arise, they are able to work to find solutions and voice discontent without belittling themselves or others. Instead of saying "I'm an idiot," a child with healthy self-esteem says, "I don't understand this." They accept their

strengths and weaknesses and have an overall sense of optimism.

Self-assured children take pride in their accomplishments, tolerate frustration, attempt new challenges and handle both positive and negative emotions.

Healthy self-esteem isn't gained and secured infinitely; a child's self-esteem can waver through the years as he encounters new experiences.

Sometimes parents cannot boost their children's self-esteem by themselves. Professional counselors can work to uncover underlying issues that prevent a child from feeling good about himself or herself. With therapy, children can learn to see themselves more realistically and positively.