

Tips to fostering self-esteem

How can a parent help to foster healthy self-esteem in a child? These tips can make a big difference:

Watch what you say and how you say it. Children are very sensitive to parents' words. Remember to praise your child not only for a job well done, but also for effort. But be truthful. For example, if your child doesn't make the soccer team, avoid saying something like, "Well, next time you'll work harder and make it." Instead, try "Well, you didn't make the team, but I'm really proud of the effort you put into it." Reward effort and completion instead of outcome.

Be a positive role model. If you're excessively harsh on yourself, pessimistic or unrealistic about your abilities and limitations, your child may eventually mirror you. Nurture your own self-esteem, and your child will have a great role model.

Redirect your child's inaccurate beliefs. It's important for parents to identify children's irrational beliefs about themselves, whether they're about perfection, attractiveness, ability or anything else. Helping children set more accurate standards and be more realistic in evaluating themselves will help them have a healthy self-concept. Inaccurate perceptions of self can take root and become reality to children.

Be spontaneous and affectionate. Your love will go a long way to boost your child's self-esteem. Give hugs and tell children you're proud of them. Pop a note in your child's lunchbox that reads, "I think you're terrific!" Give praise frequently and honestly, without overdoing it.

Children can tell whether something comes from the heart.

Create a safe, nurturing home environment. Children who don't feel safe or are abused at home will suffer immensely from low self-esteem. A child who is exposed to parents who fight and argue repeatedly may become depressed and withdrawn. Also watch for signs of abuse by others, problems in school, trouble with peers and other factors that may affect children's self-esteem.

Be generous with praise. Parents must develop the habit of looking for situations in which children are doing good jobs, displaying talents or demonstrating positive character traits. Remember to praise children for jobs well done and for effort.

Teach positive self-statements. It is important for parents to redirect children's inaccurate or negative beliefs about themselves and to teach them how to think in positive ways.

Avoid criticism that takes the form of ridicule or shame. Blame and negative judgments are at the core of poor self-esteem and can lead to emotional disorders.

Show children that you can laugh at yourself. Show them that life doesn't need to be serious all the time and that some teasing is all in fun. Your sense of humor is important for their well-being.

Your child's self esteem can be increased by your:

- ◆ Appreciating your child
- ◆ Telling your child that you love him or her
- ◆ Spending time with your child
- ◆ Encouraging your child to make choices



- ◆ Fostering independence in your children
- ◆ Giving genuine importance to your child's opinion and listening
- ◆ Taking the time to explain reasons
- ◆ Feeding your child with positive encouragement

- ◆ Encouraging your child to try new and challenging activities

(Information for this article was derived from The Federal Center for Mental Health Services, an agency of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, more-selfesteem.com and KidsHealth.org.)