



A Parent's Guide to Self-Esteem

We all want our kids to feel good about themselves. Too little self-esteem leads to sadness, failure, and poor relationships, but too much self-love isn't great for kids either. If a young person thinks very very highly of themselves, they may not be open to working on real challenges, they may develop a sense of entitlement, and they can become narcissistic. Parents should strive to help kids develop a balanced, healthy, and realistic view of themselves. With that in mind, please consider a few ideas to promote the best in your children.

- ✓ Be careful what you say to kids because they can be especially sensitive to the things that valued adults say about them. It is useful to praise a well done job, but also to praise the effort if they've given it their *all* but didn't get it quite right. You will rarely go wrong if you recognize effort and completion rather than a perfect outcome.
- ✓ When there is not a good match between your child's skills and the expected task, use humor to let them know that you too have not always been able to accomplish everything that you've attempted. You could say something like, "Yeah, baking my first cake was a real disaster" or "Little League wasn't my thing either."
- ✓ Be a great role model for your kids. Show them that hard work is important and recognition of that effort is appropriate. Nurture your own self-esteem and they'll have the role model that they need.
- ✓ Encourage involvement in activities that will allow them to recognize their ability to grow as people. People with good self-esteem feel able to handle life's demands and those with a wider variety of skills often feel better equipped to move toward a secure future. You may want to think about horseback riding, scuba or karate training. You might want to have them help around the house and learn how to install an electric socket, bake brownies, or use the washing machine.
- ✓ Praise has often been thought of as the ideal way to boost self-confidence, but it has some limitations. When you praise your daughter or son, make an effort to use an undeniable fact or *metric* to insure that they will fully believe that your comment is accurate. Example: "Your 87% on the spelling test shows you're making progress" is a better than, "You're such a smart kid." It is more useful to say, "All of that sweat that's pouring off your face tells me that you put massive effort into that race" is better than saying, "Wow, you really ran fast."
- ✓ A positive comment combined with a hug or a pat on the back will reinforce their positive feeling about you as well as their positive regard for themselves. Consider putting a positive note in your child's lunch box or on their pillow. A note is often much better than a comment because the impact returns every time they read it. Consider putting a note in an odd place because surprises are often even more memorable (e.g., in their shoe, under the toilet lid, inside their baseball glove, attached to the cereal box, etc.).
- ✓ Loving homes with few arguments promote healthy self-esteem. Kids who don't feel safe or are mistreated are at the most risk for developing poor self-esteem. Kids who are exposed to big doses of parental conflict may feel out of control and are more likely to act out, experience internal conflicts, have problems using their brains, and are more apt to become depressed. If a child's self-esteem is poor, it may be useful to look for signs of abuse by others.
- ✓ Constructive experiences build self-confidence. Activities that encourage cooperation rather than competition are especially helpful in fostering self-esteem. Consider mentoring programs, allow your child to be a *study buddy* to a less able student, involve them in volunteer work, or find other ways to contribute to the community.
- ✓ Make an effort to speak positively about your child in the presence of the most important people in her or his life like grandparents, other relatives, teachers, or friends.



✓ Avoid making comments in which you compare your child to others, saying, "why can't you study like your sister?"

✓ If your son or daughter struggles at school, you might want to give the next year's teacher a "head's up" regarding their needs. If they struggle with ADHD or have some disability, use the resources available from your school . . . and don't take 'no' for an answer.

✓ Self-esteem comes from feeling safe, secure & loved,

but also from a realistic sense of *competence*. The truth is that developing *competence* requires effort . . . it's not just a matter to kind words. It requires hard work!

✓ Allow your son or daughter to take healthy risks. It may feel uncomfortable to send your nine-year-old off to a sleep-away camp, but they are apt to come home with a greater sense of autonomy. You may wonder if your daughter is fully ready to drive at 16, but trusting the driving instructor may be better than waiting until they turn 21 to allow driving.

✓ Build a responsible kid. The world tends to reward responsibility and doesn't have much respect for those who appear lazy. If you want others to see and reinforce your kid's emerging competence, they require responsibilities. Be sure that your kids help around the house with tasks like doing dishes, cleaning bathrooms, picking up after themselves, and helping with meal prep. If a parent does "poop patrol" rather than a child, the kid may fully believe that they are "too good" to perform distasteful tasks.

✓ Encourage them to fully develop their interests. Self-esteem is often raised when a young person recognizes their unique talent . . . perhaps as a cheerleader, a robotics team member, a pitcher in baseball, or a chess champ. People often feel most special when their ability is quite unique and their expertise is developed over time.

✓ Consider starting a *self-esteem checklist* with positive statements written on their bathroom mirror with a *dry erase* marker (e.g., 93% in spelling, new talent - guitar!, etc). Your kid will be looking at some of the most positive parts of themselves several times a day. Add to the list regularly!

Words to Know: *Responsibility Integrity Values Entitlement Diligent*

Brainy Quotes:



"The worst loneliness is to not be comfortable with yourself." Mark Twain

"One's dignity may be assaulted, vandalized and cruelly mocked, but it can never be taken away unless it is surrendered." Michael J. Fox

"Confidence is contagious. So is lack of confidence." Vince Lombardi

"Nothing builds self-esteem and self-confidence like accomplishment."
Thomas Carlyle