

## **Raising Your Child's Self-Esteem**

Children who have high self-esteem are more confident, outgoing and receptive to challenges. Children, for example, who believe they are useless, will view a challenge with fear and distrust making it less likely that the challenge will be met. They may believe: 'There's no point in trying as I won't be able to do it.'

If this sounds like your children, here are some suggestions to help instil a stronger belief in the self.

### **Practical ways to raise children's self-esteem**

*Buy a small pocket book* for each child and together think of everything they can do and everything they are good at. Write these things down in one part of the book. Leave room to add things as your children grow in ability and maturity. In another section of the book, write down everything nice that anyone has ever said about them. Add things that you, and other family members, like about them.

*Make a poster* and display it on each child's wall – if they are not too old to worry about friends seeing it - to remind them of all their achievements and all their good qualities from being kind to the cat to skilfully kicking a ball around to being brave about visits to the dentist.

*Help your children feel proud of their achievements.* Display paintings and models made at school and any trophies won.

*Help your children feel proud of their appearance.* For young children this means wearing clothes and shoes that are clean, ironed and fit properly and are similar to what friends wear - allowing them to feel comfortable as part of a group. For older children, it also means giving way to elements of current fashion. But this does not mean you should bow to demands of expensive designer gear.

Also allow your children to have their hair as they choose – it's part of their personal identity. Don't deny them the right to be themselves, as this will give them the message that they are not good enough for you and that you will only love them if they look a certain way.

### **Emotional ways to raise children's self-esteem**

*Tell your children you love them* and always will - and when necessary, also tell them that this is not dependent on their doing well at things: it is unconditional love. As well as telling your children you love them, you must also frequently show it. Even teenage boys, in private, will suffer a hug now and then – or having arms around their shoulders to receive a loving squeeze.

*Tell each child they are special.* They are completely unique - there is no one else in the world quite like them.

*Praise your children* whenever possible to make them feel good about themselves. Make the praise specific to add meaning. For example, after you have shared a joke, you could say, 'I love your sense of fun' or, 'You have a great sense of humour,' or, 'I really enjoy your company.' However, only praise your children when it is deserved, otherwise it becomes meaningless and they will doubt the value of what people say even when it is genuine.

*Tell your children how proud you are of them* when they have overcome, for example, fear or anxiety. Say you sometimes get scared too but once you face your difficulties, it gets easier. Knowing that parents find things hard relieves children of feeling guilty or embarrassed about having trouble coping.

*Allow your children to be comfortable with themselves.* Explain that many things just don't matter and that they will sort themselves out, such as children developing different skills at different rates. If your children are behind in one thing, they are probably ahead in another. What is important is your children's happiness.

### **Day to day tips to raise children's self-esteem**

*Stick up for your children* if they are being bullied in any way. Show that they matter. If school is involved, take the matter to the Headteacher in primary schools or the Head of Year in secondary schools – don't approach parents of bullying children directly as this can create more problems.

*Listen to how you interact with your children.* Is the majority of feedback they get from you positive or do you nag unnecessarily or show your disappointment by sighing or being sarcastic with them? If so, try to be more gentle, understanding and tolerant.

*Try to understand your children.* Ask for reasons if your children do something out of character. Ask why they did it instead of brushing it aside or telling them off. It might give you insight into the way their mind works and it may be that you totally misread the situation. This will help them trust you more as they see that their feelings are important to you.

*Have fun with your children* on a regular basis or they might see life with you as very functional and matter-of-fact, which might make them feel out of touch with you. To be emotionally close, special moments need to be shared.

*Give your children responsibility.* Let them make choices about their life as far as possible so that they have a sense of being in control. This can be related to what vegetable or fruit they eat during a meal, for example, if they are very young or what subjects they take for GCSE if they are older – you can always discuss and advise but your children are unlikely to do well in a subject if it is forced upon them. And if you want your children to be selective in their viewing of the television, give them an allowance of, say, an hour or two a night, and let them decide which programmes to watch and which to abandon. Soon they will become much more discerning and realise the value of their own time.

You should also let your children help in the home such as by taking responsibility for looking after a pet and for keeping their rooms clean and tidy when they are old enough. Always thank them for their help or for doing a good job if the benefit is not directly aimed at you.

*Talk to your children* as equals, valuing their opinions and seeking their advice over things with which they could help. But don't burden them with your concerns.

### **Avoid damaging children's self-esteem**

As well as knowing what things to do, there are some things you must not do – they will undo all the positive work you have done and can cause lasting damage to your children's self-esteem.

*Don't make dramas out of crises.* For example, if your children break something and it was truly accidental, getting angry and shouting does not mend the broken object – it only hurts your children's feelings. If the object was precious to you, simply say it meant a great deal to you because, for example, your mother gave it to you when you were a child. Allow your children to apologise and give you a hug. Say you understand it was accidental and they are not to worry about it any more.

*Never put your children down:* if they do something wrong, they'll probably know it without you having to say something like, 'Typical!' This is a particularly non-useful comment as it describes a child generally, labelling in a negative way. Instead, address the behaviour by saying something like, 'That was a silly thing to do, don't you think?'

*Don't talk negatively about your children in their hearing.* If they hear people being critical of them, they will assume that others will see the same shortcomings and come to the same conclusion. They will then label themselves in a negative way.

*Don't hint by word or deed* that you are in any way disappointed with your children, unless it is over something small that you genuinely feel they could have managed but chose not to.

*Don't blame your children for anything that is not their fault* – don't take out personal frustration and anger on them. And, if you have said or done something in anger, your children deserve an apology.

*Don't disregard your children's feelings.* If they are upset, they shouldn't be told to pull themselves together and act their age. The matter should be gently discussed and a solution sought with your children's assistance. This helps them gain the confidence to work out similar problems on their own when they are older.

Caring and skilled parenting is difficult especially when you have concerns that interfere with how you handle your children. However, children are very forgiving and as long as you show you are trying, and are willing to apologise when you make a mistake, they will know they have your respect and your love. And that goes a long way in raising children's self-esteem.

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