

# Boost Your Child's Self-Esteem

Parents can help a child develop the powerful trait of self-esteem.

## Children with high self-esteem:

- Feel good about themselves
- Are confident in the contributions they make
- Are more willing to take positive risks and to take responsibility for their actions
- Are better able to cope with life's changes and challenges
- Are resilient in the face of rejection, disappointment, failure or defeat

## Children with low self-esteem:

- Have feelings of worthlessness
- Lack confidence in their abilities
- Doubt their decisions
- Take failure personally
- Are less likely to stand up to negative peer pressure
- Are more likely to engage in self-destructive behaviors (drugs or alcohol, violence, early onset sexual activity, overeating)



**Parents can make a positive difference in their child's self-perception by holding their children in high regard, giving encouragement and showing unconditional love.**

## Ways to help children develop healthy self-esteem:

- **View your child as a unique person.** Be positive and focus on your child's strengths. Don't compare him to friends or siblings. Be supportive of his interests and involved in his activities.
- **Accept your child's feelings, and teach him how to deal with emotions in a positive way.** Let him know what behavior is acceptable when reacting to a situation. *"It's okay to be mad, but you cannot hit your sister. Hitting is unsafe. Let's talk it through."*
- **Be a good listener.** Let your child know he can talk to you about anything. Be ready to listen. Sometimes children just want to be heard.
- **Keep expectations realistic.** Have developmentally appropriate expectations, and celebrate your child's efforts and successes. Expecting a child to do things she is not developmentally capable of will lead to feelings of frustration and inadequacy.



- **Clearly communicate your expectations.** When a child knows what to expect, it helps him cooperate and face situations with confidence. For example, if you want your child to clean his room, be specific – the bed should be made and the dirty clothes should be in the hamper.
- **Build in success.** Create opportunities where your child can be successful. Acknowledge effort and improvements instead of waiting for a task to be completed or a skill to be mastered.
- **Give age appropriate responsibilities and expect cooperation.** Give your child opportunities to help with tasks or chores around the house. Show appreciation for his contributions. Allow him to take the lead and complete projects. Be patient while he is learning new skills.
- **Resist taking over.** When your child is facing a challenging situation, let her know that you have faith in her and her capabilities. Model problem-solving, and give feedback in a positive, constructive way.
- **View mistakes as opportunities to learn.** When your child makes a mistake, focus on solutions rather than retribution.
- **Give choices.** Choices allow children to develop responsibility and a sense of ownership. Give choices appropriate to your child's developmental age. *"Do you want to wear blue pants or red pants?" "Would you rather cut the grass or sweep the garage before you go to the movies?"*
- **Keep a sense of humor.** Model a sense of playfulness, and help children see the humor in life. Play music while doing chores. Sing a song to transition from one activity to another. Tell a funny story about when you made a mistake and how it turned out.
- **Share an optimistic view of life.** Talk regularly about positive things that are happening. When things aren't going well, provide support and encouragement and focus on solutions.

### **Model and encourage kindness.**

- Encourage your child to treat others with kindness.
- Read books or watch movies with a kindness theme.
- Comment when you see your child being kind. *"Wow, that was kind of you to help your sister with the dishes."*

### **When children are of service to others, they feel connected and valuable.**

- Provide service in the community or volunteer as a family (e.g. animal shelter, food bank).
- School-age children and teens can read to younger children.
- Smile at a neighbor or hold the door open for an elderly person.

### **Above all else, love and accept your child.**

Your child's pediatrician should be your primary source of advice about your child's health.