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## BUILDING CHILDREN'S SELF-ESTEEM



**Self-esteem** is defined as a person's sense of worth. It is made up of our thoughts about ourselves and plays a role in almost everything we do. To thrive, children need positive self-esteem to trust in their capabilities while, at the same time, knowing that they can handle it if they aren't successful at something.

Children with **positive self-esteem** learn to confront problems and resist peer pressure as they get older. More importantly, it helps them feel happy and capable of maintaining personal relationships.

As every child is different, it may be easier for some children to develop positive self-esteem while others may struggle to achieve this. Children with **low self-esteem** feel less secure in themselves and their abilities, tend to give up easily and find it challenging to deal with mistakes.



Children with low self-esteem often:

- Assume that luck plays a large role in all their achievements and do not take the credit for the role they played in their success
- Downplay or ignore their positive qualities
- Struggle to believe a person who compliments them
- Judge themselves to be inferior to their peers
- Blame themselves when things go wrong instead of taking into account other things over which they have no control, such as the actions of other people or economic forces
- Are extremely critical of themselves
- Use negative words to describe themselves, such as stupid, fat, ugly, or unlovable
- Have discussions with themselves that are always negative, critical, and self-blaming (this is called 'negative self-talk')
- Feel frustrated, angry, anxious, or sad
- Lose interest in learning
- Avoid trying new things
- Struggle to make and keep friends

The good news is that even if a child's self-esteem is low, it can be raised. The following list offers some guidance on how parents can enhance their child's self-esteem:

- **Show unconditional love to your child**



This seems obvious, but it is probably the most important thing you can give your child. Even if you do it imperfectly, which we all do, always give out plenty of love. When you make a parenting mistake, like ignoring your child or yelling at them in a moment of anger, hug your child and tell them you're sorry and love them. Unconditional love builds a strong foundation for positive self-esteem.

- **Give your child choices**

Giving choices will help to empower your child, but it is important to limit the choices to two options. Learning to make simple choices while your child is young will help prepare them for the more difficult choices they will face as they grow older.



- **Instil independence and adventure**

Self-confident children are willing to try new things without fear of failure. Set up safe situations where your child can do things for themselves. Encourage exploration, whether it's a trip to a new park or new foods at mealtime. Daytrips and outings, new hobbies, vacations, and trips with friends can all expand your child's horizons and build confidence in their ability to handle new situations.

- **Teach resilience**



No one succeeds at everything all the time. There will be setbacks and failures, criticism, and pain. Use these hurdles as learning opportunities rather than dwelling on the events as failures or disappointments.

When your child knows that it is OKAY to fail and there are solutions to mistakes, it can help build self-esteem. Help them develop a positive mantra for failures and mistakes. You can also help your child learn from their mistakes by discussing what they can do the next time. For example, if your child fails a test, talk about what steps they can take to do better next time. When they do succeed, they will take pride in their accomplishment.

**POSITIVE MANTRAS**

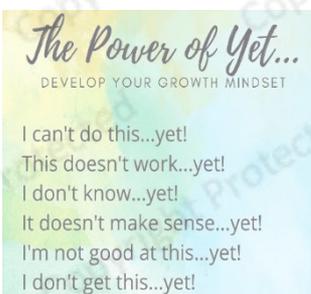
"Try, try and try again"

"Mistakes help us learn"

"Mistakes bring out new and creative ideas"

"Trying your best is better than getting it right or wrong"

- **Help your child reframe negative thoughts and statements**



Children with a growth mindset believe their abilities can improve over time. (As opposed to children with a fixed mindset, who think their abilities are set and can't change, no matter how hard they try.) For example, your child might say, "I can't read that. It's too hard because I have dyslexia." You can respond by saying, "Yes, reading is hard for you, and you can't read that book yet. Let's formulate a plan to get better at it." Adding the word "yet" to the end of a negative self-statement gives children a path into their future and makes them feel that they are on a learning curve rather than a dead end.

- **Give praise where praise is due**

It's important to give your child praise and positive feedback because children measure their worth and achievements by how their parents view them. However, be realistic in your praise,



**How to praise:**

- **Don't overpraise.** Praise that doesn't feel earned doesn't ring true. For example, telling a child he played a great game, when he knows he didn't, feels hollow and fake. It's better to say, "I know that wasn't your best game, but we all have off days. I'm proud of you for not giving up." You can also add a vote of confidence: "Tomorrow, you'll be back on your game."
- **Praise effort.** Avoid focusing praise only on results (such as getting an A) or fixed qualities (such as being smart or athletic). Instead, offer most of your praise for effort, progress, and attitude. For example: "You're working hard on that project", "You're getting better and better at these spelling tests", "I'm proud of you for practising the piano — you've stuck with it." With this kind of praise, kids put effort into things, work toward goals, and try. When kids do that, they're more likely to succeed.

as how you

praise your child matters. Rather than just focusing on the result, praise how your child went about it. Acknowledging the approach your child takes to tackling challenges, helps them learn that they are capable of overcoming obstacles. Specific and honest praise is key to building positive self-esteem.

- **Encourage sports or other physical activities**

Sports help children build confidence. They learn that they can practise, improve, and achieve goals. It teaches them to recognize their strengths, accept or strengthen their weaknesses, handle defeat, expand their circle of friends, and learn teamwork.



- **Set rules and be consistent**

Children are more confident when they know who is in charge and what to expect. Even if your child thinks your rules are too strict, they will have confidence in what they can and cannot do when you set rules and enforce them consistently. Every household will have different rules, and they will change over time based on your child's age. Whatever your household rules, be clear on what is important in your family.

- **Assign age-appropriate household chores**

Give children responsibility for tasks, such as setting the table, walking the dog, and folding laundry. They'll increase their feelings of competency and enhance their problem-solving skills.

- **Be a good role model**

When you put effort into everyday tasks (like making a meal or washing the dishes), you are setting a good example. Your child learns to put effort into doing homework, cleaning up toys, or making their bed. It is also important to model the right attitude.

- **Point out successful role models who have learning or attention difficulties**

Knowing there are successful people, including athletes, celebrities, and entrepreneurs with learning and attention difficulties who faced similar struggles can also be a source of inspiration. For example, actor Daniel Radcliffe has said that doing stunt work for the *Harry Potter* movies helped him overcome some of his struggles with dyspraxia.

