



How to Improve Your Child's Self-Esteem

Self esteem is the opinion you have of yourself. It is based on the belief that you have about your own:

- value as a person
- achievements accomplished
- perception of how others view you
- purpose in life
- thoughts of how you fit in the world
- potential for success
- strengths and weaknesses that you believe you have
- relationship with others
- independence and/or ability to stand on your own feet

Educators, parents, business and government leaders agree that we need to develop individuals with healthy or high self-esteem characterized by tolerance and respect for others, individuals who accept responsibility for their actions, have integrity, take pride in their accomplishments, who are self-motivated, willing to take risks, capable of handling criticism, loving and lovable, seek the challenge and stimulation of worthwhile and demanding goals, and take command and control of their lives. In other words, we need to help foster the development of people who have healthy or authentic self-esteem because they trust their own being to be life affirming, constructive, responsible and trustworthy (Reasoner, 2006)

The suggestions below represent some ideas of what can you do to help your children promote their own sense of self-esteem:

BE SOLUTION ORIENTED

An important step in building self-esteem is to teach solutions rather than blame. Teaching children solutions to problems or frustrating situations begins with statements like, "Who's at fault is not important. The more important question is what we can do so that it doesn't happen again" or, "What do we need to do to make it work or fix the problem?"

ALLOW CHILDREN THE RIGHT TO MAKE DECISIONS

Allowing children the right to make decisions that affect their daily lives can only enhance their self-esteem. Decisions about clothing, room arrangement, and friends to invite to a party, menu for dinner etc. can make children feel some sense of control in what happens to them. You may want to begin by using a forced choice technique where you present your child 3 options to a situation, all of which are acceptable to you. In this way, the child feels like he/she is making the decision, but you maintain the control of boundaries.

OFFER ALTERNATE WAYS OF HANDLING A SITUATION

Conditioning children to see many alternate ways of handling a situation, obstacles, etc. can also enhance a sense of power and self-esteem. Asking children what they have tried and offering other options to possible solutions increase their "tool box" of skills.

TEACH CHILDREN THE PROPER LABELS WHEN COMMUNICATING FEELINGS

When children are unable to label an internal feeling they often become frustrated. When such feelings go unlabeled, they may become manifested in some negative behavior, often reducing self-esteem. Parents can offer children the correct labels, e.g., "While the feeling you are expressing sounds like anger, it is really frustration. Frustration is.....Now that you know this, is there anything that is causing you frustration?"

ALLOW CHILDREN THE OPPORTUNITY TO REPEAT SUCCESSFUL EXPERIENCES

A foundation of positive experiences is necessary for self-esteem. Since the child has mastered skills required for the job, any opportunity to repeat success can only be an ego inflating experience.

ALLOW AVENUES FOR DISAGREEMENT

In general, children with high self-esteem feel they have an avenue to communicate their concerns. Even though the result may not go in their favor, the knowledge that a situation or disagreement can be discussed with their parents allows a child to feel a sense of power in controlling his or her destiny rather than feeling like a victim.

HELP YOUR CHILD SET REALISTIC GOALS

Some children will set unrealistic goals, fall short and feel like a failure. Repeated over a period of time, the child begins to develop a sense of urgency for success and this in turn may lead to more unrealistic goals. Parents can help children by assisting them in defining their objectives and determining the necessary steps necessary to accomplish the goal. Children should not see one final goal, but a series of smaller goals leading to a final point.

USE A REWARD SYSTEM TO SHAPE POSITIVE BEHAVIOR

Punishment tells a child what not to do, while reward informs a child of what is acceptable behavior. Rewarding positive behavior increases self-esteem. Rewards can be in the form of special trips, extra time before bed, special dinners with one parent, a hug, kiss or a note in a lunchbox.

DON'T PAVE EVERY ROAD FOR CHILDREN

Parents often make the mistake of reducing frustration for children to the point where they receive a distorted view of the world. Children with high self-esteem get frustrated just like those with low self-esteem. However, they tend to be more resilient, since they have previous success in handling frustrating situations themselves. Teaching children alternate solutions, proper labels for their feelings, to set realistic goals, solution orientation and techniques to verbalize their disagreements are more productive than "bailing them out" when they are confronted with frustration.

For more information visit the National Association of Parents with Children in Special Education at www.napcse.org

References

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Reasoner, R. (2006). *The True Meaning of Self-Esteem*. Retrieved on May 20, 2006, from <http://www.self-esteem-nase.org/whatissselfesteem.shtml>