

Self-Esteem

As children grow up they form views of themselves as a person, their value as an individual and how good they are at doing things. This view of their self-worth is called self-esteem. An important part of being a parent involves encouraging children to be confident and develop healthy self-esteem. This means children having a true sense of their strengths and weaknesses. This tip sheet gives some suggestions to help you promote your child's self-esteem.

WHY IS SELF-ESTEEM IMPORTANT?

Children who have healthy self-esteem are likely to be happy, cooperative, successful at school and make friends easily. They are fun to be with because they enjoy challenges, are eager to learn and enjoy success. They are also likely to cope with stress effectively and are less likely to develop behaviour problems than children with low self-esteem.

Children with low self-esteem often feel inadequate, are reluctant to try new things and give up easily. They have few goals and rarely achieve them, and they often let others take advantage of them. They are also more likely to misbehave or become anxious or depressed.

WHAT CAUSES LOW SELF-ESTEEM?

Low self-esteem is caused by children thinking and believing bad things about themselves. This negative 'self-talk' is often untrue. For example, a child may tell themselves they are dumb, ugly, stupid, naughty, mean, selfish or a bad person.

Many things can cause children to develop critical and destructive ways of thinking about themselves, including:

- Lack of praise, affection or attention.
- Not having achievements recognised.
- Lack of limits and discipline.
- Hurtful, blaming and critical comments or actions.

- Unfavourable comparisons with brothers and sisters.
- Lack of encouragement for self-care and hygiene.
- Lack of regular exercise and fitness.
- Physical or emotional abuse.
- Frequent arguments and conflict between parents.

HOW TO ENCOURAGE HEALTHY SELF-ESTEEM

▼ Praise Your Child for Their Efforts and Achievements

Children who receive plenty of praise and encouragement feel good about themselves. Talk about the things your child does well, rather than criticising their weaknesses. If you need to talk about weaknesses, make sure you talk about strengths first. Say something like — *Ben, your bowling is getting really fast and accurate, but we might need to*

spend some time practising your batting.

It is important to focus on your child's efforts and not just the final result. If you only praise outstanding results, your child may feel that just being themselves and doing their best is not good enough. If you praise your child for trying and making improvements, they will be more motivated to continue trying at a difficult task. Successful results may take a while to achieve and children may give up if their efforts are not recognised along the way.

▼ Tell Your Child You Care

Tell your child you love them. Children need to be told often that they are valued and cared for. Spending time with your child and being available when they need you, will also make your child feel worthwhile and let them know that you value them as a person.

▼ Encourage a Healthy Lifestyle

Encourage good hygiene, grooming and regular exercise to help your child feel good about themselves.

▼ Teach Your Child To Be a Good Friend

Children who like themselves find it easier to like other people, and children who feel liked by others have healthy self-esteem. Encourage your child to make friends. If your child finds it hard to make friends, practise with them how to approach another child and start talking or ask if they would like to play. Encourage your child to bring friends home to play.



▼ Encourage Your Child To Set Goals

Help your child set some goals that are easy to achieve. Make sure your child's goals do not involve perfection or expectations that are too high. When your child shows initiative and ambition by making plans, such as opening a bank account or saving for something they really want, be supportive. Offer suggestions and encouraging comments, not criticisms. Help them get started by breaking the goals into smaller steps or a plan of action.

▼ Encourage Your Child's Independence

Show confidence in your child's abilities by letting your child do things for themselves as soon as they are ready. By doing things for themselves, children learn what they can do and that they can control their world. Allowing your child to take reasonable risks also lets them know that you believe in them. Encourage your child to take on new tasks, such as chores around the home, to help them develop a sense of responsibility.

▼ Encourage Your Child To Evaluate Their Own Achievements

Ask your child for their opinions about what they have accomplished. For example, if your child proudly shows you a painting they have produced, ask them to tell you about it and to let you know how they feel about it.

Avoid name calling and put downs. If your child hears often enough that they are lazy or stupid, they will start to believe these comments and act accordingly. Encourage your child to think of what they do well and what they like about themselves. Let them know they do not have to be the same as everyone else — that it is okay to be different and be good at different things.

Tell your child that it is alright to make mistakes and that this is how

we learn to do things better. Help your child to work out how to fix their own mistakes, rather than taking control yourself.

To encourage your child to feel good about their accomplishments, prompt them to give themselves some praise for their efforts. For example, say something like — *You got a B- for your last social studies project and B+ for this one. What do you think about that Roberto?*

▼ Encourage Your Child To Express Their Ideas

Children need to learn to express themselves. Listen to your child's ideas, feelings, thoughts and hopes. Summarise what they have said and ask questions to help them develop their own opinion.

▼ Encourage Laughter

Laughter is a great emotional release. Children who feel good about themselves laugh spontaneously, develop a sense of humour and learn to tell funny stories. Encourage this skill by listening to your child's stories, playing games and having fun together.

▼ Let Your Child Make Decisions

Encourage your child to do things they like to do. Avoid pushing your child into things that you would like them to do. If parents impose their opinion too strongly, children can feel pressured into choices such as playing a particular sport or musical instrument. Follow and encourage your child's interests and talents. Where appropriate, let them make decisions for themselves. Involve your child in family decision-making, such as the negotiation of house rules.

HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD MANAGE NEGATIVE SELF-TALK

▼ Talk About Making Mistakes

Let your child know that making mistakes or failing at times does not

make them a complete failure. Talk about things that you are finding difficult or feel you did not do well. Admit your own failures and frustrations and talk about what you did or plan to do to make the situation better. If you are anxious about a big event, talk about your feelings with your child. By your example, your child will learn that taking risks means failure is possible, and that no one can be good at everything.

▼ Help Your Child Deal With Disappointment

Many children put themselves down occasionally. When a child says things like — *I'm dumb, you hate me, or I'm stupid* — sometimes it is a reaction to being disappointed or not getting their own way, such as not being chosen for a team. When your child expresses strong negative feelings about themselves, avoid becoming overly sympathetic. Children can easily learn that criticising themselves gets attention.

Coping with set-backs and disappointments is part of life. Encourage your child to try again after a set-back and to enjoy an activity or game even if they are not the winner. Rather than simply reassuring your child that everything is alright, let your child know that you understand their feelings and help them work out a way of dealing with the situation.

▼ Help Your Child Cope With Their Feelings

Sometimes when children are upset they need a little extra attention and support. Finding something you can do together for a short while will distract your child from feeling upset.

▼ Encourage Realistic Thinking

Teach your child to think realistically. For example, if your

child says that they think they are not as good as the other children at school, help them to think of more helpful things to say to themselves — *I might not be the best in the class at maths, but I'm good at spelling and drawing or I'll ask for some help from the teacher if I get stuck.*

▼ Give Your Child Accurate Information

When children are upset about something because they have misunderstood a situation, tell them what actually happened. For example, if a child is upset and blames themselves for the death of a pet, explain the true situation — *Michelle, I know you're upset about Booma dying, but he was a very old dog. It's nobody's fault that he died.*

▼ Help Your Child Be Optimistic

Talk to your child in a positive, optimistic way about future challenges, jobs, tasks or responsibilities. Avoid dwelling on negative past experiences.

HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD SOLVE PROBLEMS

▼ Set a Good Example

Children learn a lot through watching others. Let your child see how you deal with problems. Talk to them about how a problem can be broken down into smaller parts that can be worked out one at a time.

▼ Involve Your Child in Family Problem Solving Meetings

Call a family meeting to discuss an issue. Start with a problem that is

easily solved, for example where to have the next family outing. Encourage your child to participate in problem solving. When they express an opinion about a possible solution to the problem, use encouraging comments such as — *Nathan, that's a good idea!* or *Yes that's one possibility Isabella. Can you think of any more?*

▼ Teach Your Child the Problem Solving Steps

The steps in problem solving are as follows:

- State the problem clearly.
- Come up with some possible solutions — 'brain storm'.
- Choose the best solution.
- Try out the solution.
- Review how the solution worked and make any necessary changes.

▼ Prompt Your Child To Solve Their Own Problems

Encourage your child to take responsibility for solving their

problems. When your child has a problem, such as completing an assignment or having an argument with a friend, rather than telling your child what to do, prompt them to use the problem solving steps. Say something like — *John, I know this is important to you, but I can't solve the problem for you. Let's do some brain storming and see what we can come up with.* Ask your child to choose the best solution — *Now Janine, what are you going to say if Julia tries to copy your work in class today?*

POINTS TO REMEMBER

Low self-esteem can also be a sign of more serious emotional problems such as anxiety or depression. If your child has been anxious or sad for a long time, consider seeking professional advice.

KEY STEPS

- Praise your child's efforts and achievements.
- Tell your child you care.
- Help your child make friends.
- Encourage your child to set goals, do things for themselves and evaluate their own achievements.
- Encourage your child to express their ideas and make decisions.
- Help your child manage their feelings, think realistically and be optimistic.
- Teach your child to solve problems for themselves.

FOR FURTHER HELP See the Positive Parenting booklet for more information on positive parenting strategies. If you have any questions or have tried these strategies and are concerned about your child's progress, contact the service where you were given this tip sheet.

Triple P is a parenting program developed by Professor Matthew R. Sanders and colleagues in the Parenting and Family Support Centre, School of Psychology at The University of Queensland with funding support from Queensland Health, Victorian Department of Human Services, Health Department of Western Australia, and National Health and Medical Research Council.

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