



Self Esteem

Self-esteem has to do with how we feel about ourselves. High self-esteem can make it easier for children to face life struggles and perform better in groups than children with low self-esteem. But sometimes our efforts to improve children's self esteem simply cause *excessive pride*, and/or *empty pride* (pride in oneself that is not backed up by actual mastery of a skill.)

Instead of having our efforts towards self-esteem create empty pride, **think of building self-esteem as *building character*.** Then, high self-esteem will be linked to positive qualities that are valued in society. Not, "I like myself because I am great" but "I like myself because I have integrity". Let integrity be the marker of esteem.

How to build your child's self esteem:

Role model

- Be aware when you use derogatory statements about yourself. Can you acknowledge your own strengths, or are you always putting yourself down?
- Be aware how you express pride in yourself. Is it arrogance, or is it related to belief in one's own ability to do the right thing and act compassionately. Is it expressed humbly?
- What about when someone else compliments you? Do you brush it off? Or do you "crow" and brag? Or--do you graciously say thanks--acknowledging your accomplishment humbly--and then remember to praise others too.

Enjoy each child

Remember to find something enjoyable about each of your children. It is very important that a child feel lovable, likable and worthy of your care and attention. Many children will go out of their way to display all the behaviors that could make them not seem lovable. This is how they've learned to get attention, even though it's negative attention. Find something in your child that is special and lovable. And then let them know how you feel.

Create opportunities for success

Are there specific ways that your children can contribute their skills and talents in your family? Are you on the lookout for new roles that are a reflection of your children's strengths? This will help build not only self-esteem (I like myself), but also self-confidence (I can do it!)

Acknowledge specific positive behaviors and highlight the character trait that motivates that behavior

For example—you observe your child saying hello to a new girl at church. You say,
Sally, I can always count on you to welcome new people. You are a very welcoming person and I really like that about you!"

Show appreciation

Praising a child's positive behavior can help them feel good about themselves. *Thanking* a child for their positive behavior can help them not only feel good about themselves--but also help them make a connection between their behavior and it's effect on others around them.

Responding to negative self-statements

Sometimes children are their own harshest critics. How do you respond to your child when they say things like "I can't do anything right!" Or "I'm bad at art". Can you avoid false sentiment (You're not bad at doing art! You're a great artist!) AND remember to:

- Validate the feeling (you really don't like what you are drawing, huh?)
- Discuss with your child that no one is an expert at everything.
- Suggest that there are other things that your child excels at--be specific!
- Suggest that there are other reasons besides "being great at it" for engaging in a behavior (enjoyment, relaxation, etc.)
- Remind your child that a person "gets good" at something through practice. And if they want to improve their skills in that area, you'd be glad to help them.

Express belief in your child's innate integrity

Children can sink to our lowest expectations or rise to our highest. Let your child know that you think they are capable and worthy. For example, children sometimes engage in bragging behavior after winning a game. To prevent this, as a game nears the end, you can simply say: *"I know that you are a truly caring person and that you know how to be a good winner."* If necessary, you can prompt with something like, *"A good winner might say something like, 'thanks for the game, that was fun!'"*