

BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM IN CHILDREN

A child's sense of self-worth is a major factor in his or her future. How children feel about themselves will affect their choice of friends, how they get along with others, whether they live up to their potential both in school and in life, and their behavior both now and later. Self-esteem influences all aspects of our lives.

There are a number of things parents and caregivers can do to help children learn that they are lovable, capable, and competent, beginning when children are very young. Children learn their first lessons about self-esteem from parents.

Here are some things you can do to help your children develop healthy self-esteem.

- **Research shows that children with high self-esteem have parents who show them lots of unconditional love, affection, and acceptance through both words and physical actions. Tell them you love them several times every day, hug them often, and smile a lot.**
- **Praise them. There is no such thing as too much praise, but it should be deserved. Praise everyday events like getting ready for school on time, coming to the dinner table the first time their called, or taking their bath without a fuss. You can always find some small thing to praise a child for if you look. Focus on the positives rather than the negatives. If you praise positive behaviors, your child is less likely to engage in negative ones. "Catch them being good."**
- **Treat them with respect. Do not be judgmental, overly critical, or scornful, even when your child engages in behavior that is disturbing to you. Language is powerful. It can build or destroy self-esteem.**
- **Don't demand perfection. Nobody's perfect, and we shouldn't expect our children to be. Never punish a child who is trying his or her best, no matter what the outcome. Children need to know we love them just as they are.**
- **Allow your children to be themselves. Children who are pressured to be someone they're not or to do something they cannot do may end up rebelling. On the other hand, expecting too little of a child can be damaging also. There is a delicate balance between demanding too much and expecting too little. Just as pushing children too hard can be damaging emotionally, so can overprotecting them. When we do things for our children what they can and should do for themselves, we are robbing them of a vital life experience.**
- **Good communication is critical. Really listen to and respond to them. Let them know that their comments, questions, and feelings are important to you.**
- **Spend time with them. Set aside a special time each day to give each child your undivided attention. This will be much more difficult if you have more than one child, but it can still be done. Even a few minutes of quality time sends your child the message that he or she is important to you. This time should be fun and stress-free.**
- **Encourage them to make decisions for themselves. Give them choices from options you approve of. Offer only two or three choices to the very young child. It's important that you require your child to stick to a decision once it has been made. For example, don't "rescue" a child who has chosen strawberry ice cream, then has a taste and decides that he/she really wants chocolate.**