

Improving Your Child's Self-Esteem

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Most parents want their children to feel good about themselves. Research proves that children with high self-esteem are usually more successful, productive and happy. On the other hand, low self-esteem contributes to a variety of individual and societal problems.

Parents can make a tremendous difference in children by building their self-esteem. For high self-esteem children must feel loved and capable. They must believe that they have something special to offer to others. We want them to feel confident that they can handle themselves at home, with peers and at school. We want our children to feel good about themselves and there are specific ways to encourage this.

How to improve your child's self-esteem:

Praise them publicly and reprimand them privately.

Use praise frequently and repeatedly.

Be specific and concrete in your praise.

Give them positive attention- catch them doing good things and point it out to them.

Spend individual time with them.

Listen to them with undivided attention

Encourage them to express their feelings verbally and show them you understand and accept how they feel.

Teach them it is OK to be imperfect. We all make mistakes and that's OK.

Teach them to deal with teasing confidently and assertively.

Show them and tell them they are loved, valued and considered special.

Stress their positive attributes.

Help them to be happy with whom they are versus trying to fit into societal stereotypes of beauty, weight, possessions, etc.

Separate the child from their actions- "hitting is unacceptable" vs. "you're bad".

In addition to building their self-esteem we want to try not to decrease it as well. This happens when we place too much emphasis on the negative aspects of their behavior. Here is a common example:

A parent is having difficulty with her daughter who sometimes does not tell the truth. The mother sees her daughter talking on the telephone after the mother has taken this privilege away for the day. The girl hangs up the phone as she hears her mother approach.

"Missy, were you just talking on the phone?" the mother asks.

"No way mom, I know my phone privileges are gone for today" she replies.

"Missy I know you were talking on the phone, and now, to make it worse, you're not just a sneaky person but you're also a liar!" mom says angrily.

A more positive approach would be not to “invite” the child to lie. The mother would simply say, “*Missy you are not allowed to be on the phone and now that restriction will be extended for two days because you did not obey*”. If they deny the behavior we refuse to discuss what we know to be true. When the daughter says, “*But mom I really wasn’t talking on the phone*”, the mother should reply “*We’re not going to argue about it, you have phone restriction for two additional days*”.

Children want to avoid punishment. They may be dishonest in their attempt to do so. Rather than label them as a “liar” we simply impose the appropriate consequence. Do not take their lie as a personal assault on the parent-child relationship. Emphasize that we expect them to tell the truth and there are negative consequences when they do not; as well as positive ones when they are truthful.