

Boosting Your Child's Self-Esteem

"I can is 100 times more important than IQ." —Anonymous

High self-esteem—and the good things that go with it—is an important piece of a child's positive identity. As a parent, however, it is important that you teach your kids to balance high self-esteem with a high regard and respect for others; humility, in other words. Striking that balance is one of our goals.

Try it...

For all parents

- The most important piece of the self-esteem puzzle is personal power—the sense your child gets from knowing they can have an affect on their world. Finding ways for your child to set a goal and achieve it is important.
- Give specific, genuine praise. Kids know when parents are just handing out the compliments and when they're truly impressed or pleased. Describe what you see, hear, or experience that you think is pretty cool.

For parents with children ages birth to 5

- Correct misbehavior by redirecting your child's attention and then offering praise for the positive action you want.
- Teach your children to be like "The Little Engine That Could" by using positive self-talk. The Little Engine, for example, wanted to climb over a mountain for the first time with a very large, heavy load. The whole way the Little Engine repeated to himself the phrase "I think I can; I think I can; I think I can."

For parents with children ages 6 - 9

- A child's personal power (self-esteem) might come from successful team work, a rewarding service activity, or remembering to do chores without being told. Look for ways to identify and recognize your child's growing personal power.
- Help your child learn to brainstorm and choose solutions to problems so that he or she learns to be empowered.
- Regularly remind your child of specific things you appreciate about her or him ("Thanks for remembering to feed the cat without being reminded" or "You are so thoughtful to your friends" or "I loved the way you shared your apples with Ryan today").

For parents with children ages 10 - 15

- Watch for behavior that is more “show off” than self-assured. If the behavior was your child’s, gently let them know how their behavior might affect others. If it’s the behavior of their friends or someone else, ask how the behavior made your child feel. Such thinking about what they experience helps them begin to see a difference between the *real* and the *ideal*.
- Remind your children to treat others the way they wish to be treated. Acknowledge that this is especially difficult when others are being rude, disrespectful, or mean. Talk about when it’s important to stand up for yourself, and when it’s best to just walk away.
- Kids in this age group can carry more leadership and responsibility than many adults believe. Find opportunities for your child to take on a project from start to finish (from a bake sale for a cause to the family laundry).

For parents with children ages 16 - 18

- As you watch your teen become more empowered and self-assured, have ongoing conversations about the new responsibilities this age brings and about your confidence in their ability to navigate their expanding world.
- Continue to maintain clear boundaries for your teens as they become more independent and autonomous. Be clear that you still have certain expectations and limits. This will help them figure out who they are in the world in safe and healthy ways.
- Use mess-ups as teaching and learning opportunities for both of you. If, for example, your teen does something disrespectful, take time to talk about why it happened, what the consequences should be, how you both feel about it, and how it can be a lesson about choices for the future.

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