Helping Your Child Develop Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is a major key to success in life. The development of a positive self-concept or healthy self-esteem is extremely important to the happiness and success of children and teenagers. This page will share the basics for helping kids and teens to improve their self-esteem. It will also point you to other CDI pages and CDI products that can help you to improve your child's or teenager's self-esteem.

Self-esteem is how we feel about ourselves, and our behavior clearly reflects those feelings. For example, a child or teen with high self-esteem will be able to:

- act independently
- assume responsibility
- take pride in his accomplishments
- tolerate frustration
- attempt new tasks and challenges
- handle positive and negative emotions
- offer assistance to others

On the other hand, a child with low self-esteem will:

- avoid trying new things
- feel unloved and unwanted
- blame others for his own shortcomings
- feel, or pretend to feel, emotionally indifferent
- be unable to tolerate a normal level of frustration
- put down his own talents and abilities
- be easily influenced

Parents, more than anyone else can promote their child's self-esteem. It isn't a particularly difficult thing to do. If fact, most parents do it without even realizing that their words and actions have great impact on how their child or teenager feels about himself. Here are some suggestions to keep in mind.

When you feel good about your child, mention it to him. Parents are often quick to express negative feelings to children but somehow don't get around to describing positive feelings. A child doesn't know when you are feeling good about him and he needs to hear you tell him that you like having him in the family. Children remember positive statements we say to them. They store them up and "replay" these statements to themselves.

Be generous with praise. Use what is called ***descriptive praise*** to let your child know when they are

doing something well. You must of course become in the habit of looking for situations in which your child is doing a good job or displaying a talent. When your child ***completes a task*** or chore you could say, "I really like the way you straightened your room. You found a place for every thing and put each thing in its place." When you observe them ***showing a talent*** you might say, "That last piece you played was great. You really have a lot of musical talent." Don't be afraid to give praise often even in front of family or friends. Also, use praise to point out ***positive character traits***. For instance, "You are a very kind person." Or, "I like the way you stick with things you do even when it seems hard to do." You can even praise a child ***for something he did not do*** such as "I really liked how you accepted my answer of 'no' and didn't lose your temper."

Teach your child to practice making positive self-statements. Self-talk is very important in everything we do. Psychologists have found that negative self-talk is behind depression and anxiety. What we think determines how we feel and how we feel determines how we behave. Therefore, it is important to teach children to be positive about how they "talk to themselves." Some examples of useful self-talk are: "I can get this problem, if I just keep trying." "It's OK if our team lost today. We all tried our best and you can't win them all." "It makes me feel good to help others even if the person doesn't notice or thank me."

Avoid criticism that takes the form of ridicule or shame. Sometimes it is necessary to criticize a child's actions, and it is appropriate that parents do so. When, however the criticism is directed to the child as a person it can easily deteriorate into ridicule or shame. It is important to learn to use "I statements" rather than "You statements" when giving criticism. For instance say, "I would like you to keep your clothes in the proper place in your closet or drawers not lying all over your room;" rather than saying "Why are you such a lazy slob? Can't you take care of anything?" For detailed suggestions on how to get children to act responsibly while achieving a good parent/child relationship,

Teach your child about decision-making and to recognize when he has made a good decision. Children make decisions all the time but often are not aware that they are doing so. There are a number of ways parents can help children improve their ability to consciously make wise decisions. Children make decisions all the time but often are not aware that they are doing so. There are a number of ways parents can help children improve their ability to consciously make wise decisions.

1. Help the child clarify the problem that is creating the need for a decision. Ask him questions that pinpoint how he sees, hears, and feels about a situation and what may need to be changed.
2. Brainstorm the possible solutions. Usually there is more than one solution or choice to a given dilemma, and the parent can make an important contribution by pointing out this fact and by suggesting alternatives if the child has none.
3. Allow the child to choose one of the solutions only after fully considering the consequences. The best solution will be one that solves the problem and simultaneously makes the child feel good about himself.
4. Later join the child in evaluating the results of that particular solution. Did it work out well? Or did it fail? if so, why? Reviewing the tactics will equip the child to make a better decision the

next time around.

Develop a positive approach to providing structure for your child. All kids and teens need to accept responsibility for their behavior. They should learn self-discipline. To help children learn self-discipline, the parent needs to adopt the role of coach/teacher rather than that of disciplinarian and punisher. Learn the "Three Fs" of positive parenting. (Discipline should be fair, firm and friendly).

Ten additional steps you can take to help your child develop a positive self-image:

1. Teach children to change their demands to preferences. Point out to children that there is no reason they must get everything they want and that they need not feel angry either. Encourage them to work against anger by setting a good example and by reinforcing them when they display appropriate irritation rather than anger

2. Encourage your children to ask for what they want assertively, pointing out that there is no guarantee that they will get it. Reinforce them for asking and avoid anticipating their desires.

3. Let children know they create and are responsible for any feeling they experience. Likewise, they are not responsible for others' feelings. Avoid blaming children for how *you* feel.

4. Encourage your children to develop hobbies and interests which give them pleasure and which they can pursue independently.

5. Let children settle their own disputes between siblings and friends alike.

6. Help your children develop "tease tolerance" by pointing out that some teasing can't hurt. Help children learn to cope with teasing by ignoring it while using positive self-talk such as "names can never hurt me," "teases have no power over me," and "if I can resist this tease, then I'm building emotional muscle."

7. Help children learn to focus on their strengths by pointing out to them all the things they can do.

8. Encourage your children to behave toward themselves the way they'd like their friends to behave toward them.

9. Help your children think in terms of alternative options and possibilities rather than depending upon one option for satisfaction. A child who has only one friend and loses that friend is friendless. However, a child who has many friends and loses one, still has many. This same principle holds true in many different areas. Whenever you think there is only one thing which can satisfy you, you limit your potential for being satisfied! The more you help your children realize that there are *many* options in every situation, the more you increase their potential for satisfaction.

10. Laugh with your children and encourage them to laugh at themselves. People who take themselves *very* seriously are undoubtedly decreasing their enjoyment in life. A good sense of humor and the ability to make light of life are important ingredients for increasing one's overall enjoyment.

Finally, enjoy your children. Hang out with them. Do things together as a family but also see that each parent has "one to one" time with each child on a regular basis. For better or worse, our children learn from our example. Spending time with each child allows for full communication. Your child can share his thoughts and feelings openly. You can provide acceptance and (once in a while) guidance. Be heavy on the listening and provide lots of praise and encouragement. Depending on your own religious beliefs, you may find that helping your children develop a strong spiritual faith of their own will allow them to grow and develop into the children they were born to become.