

Self-Esteem

We all want very much to like ourselves and we generally base our self-evaluation upon two factors:

- How much other people like us
- How competent we are at whatever we do

Consider your children in this context for a moment. How much are they liked by others? Do you behave as if you want to spend time with them, as if you value spending time with them? How many friends do they have? How are they doing at school? Do they find school academically or behaviourally challenging? If they think that they are not very likable or they find school difficult then they are likely to suffer from low self-esteem.

If you provide your children with opportunities to do things that they can do well, then this will increase their good feelings about themselves.

Write down some things that your child can do well:

What haven't they done, that you think that might be able to do well? Is there something that you could teach them? Write some possibilities down:

Good self-esteem means feeling strong, competent, and as they get older – feeling independent. It means believing that you are basically a good person with a right to exist. It means expecting that most people will like and respect you most of the time.

Good self-esteem is essential to good mental health.

Note that many people, both adults and children, appear to have good self-esteem - when the reverse is actually true. Sometimes, when esteem is low, children will compensate by being overly confident or 'full of themselves'. Bullies always suffer from low self-esteem – that is one of the reasons that they bully; to try and feel important or significant because, deep down, they think that they are worthless.

Our self-esteem is fluid; it can get better or worse at anytime. If you are required to perform a task which you feel incompetent to achieve – your self-esteem will rapidly diminish. This is also true of your children.

You will always achieve more by increasing your own and your child's self-esteem, even if you are in dispute with them.

Enhancing your child's self esteem will improve your relationship and is never disadvantageous.

Nagging, criticising in a hurtful way and constantly being disapproving of what they do or don't achieve are obvious ways to reduce your child's self-esteem.

Being over helpful, doing everything for them, being too busy to spend time with them and being over protective are less-obvious ways that tend to reduce their self-esteem.

Raising self-esteem is not primarily about being nice: honesty and respect are just as important.

Smiling when you are angry with your child, or paying false compliments when you really feel critical, is not helpful but confusing.

There are many ways that you can help boost your child's self-esteem. Here are some suggestions

- Listen to them
- Show interest in what they are doing and what is important to them
- Treat them as if you enjoy their company
- With younger children, spend time watching what they are doing and reflect what you see
- Genuinely praise them whenever they do something well
- Find ways to improve your self-esteem; model having a good level of esteem
- Show that you value yourself in how you behave
- Show appreciation of them and what they do
- Show that you are 'on their side', even when in conflict
- Separate behaviour from your child. They may behave in a way that you disapprove of – disapprove of the behaviour whilst demonstrating that you are not disapproving of them
- Say what you mean, and mean what you say. Be consistent
- Send quality time together every week
- Show that you respect them as individuals
- Encourage them to take appropriate levels of responsibility, balancing their need for challenge with their need for security
- Empower them to problem solve their difficulties, rather than giving them all the answers or sorting everything out for them
- If something is important to them, then treat it with importance
- Share yourself with them. Tell them how you feel at appropriate times and encourage them to do likewise
- Be honest with them
- Cuddle them

Write down some ideas for improving your child's self-esteem:
