

Thriving During the Elementary Years - Developing Healthy Self-Esteem

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A child's self-esteem has a significant impact on their overall well-being and success in life. The process by which our self-esteem develops is complex and is influenced by many factors. Children who have healthy self-esteem typically exhibit several of the following characteristics: Willingness to try new things, taking pride in accomplishments, assuming responsibility, having good frustration tolerance, having the capacity to resist peer pressure, demonstrating effective problem-solving skills, and feeling loved. As parents there's a lot that we can do to help foster self-esteem in our children. Effective strategies include:

- **Provide positive feedback:** We live in a negativistic world, which impacts everyone's self-esteem. No one's feedback is more important to our children than ours. Make an effort to let your child know when he/she is doing something right. Use language that focuses on the specific behaviors that you want to encourage, instead of using general phrases like "good job".
- **Encourage your child to make positive self-statements:** As human beings we are talking to ourselves all the time. When our "self-talk" is primarily negative and self-critical, in addition to poor self-esteem, we are at-risk for depression, anxiety, and a host of other problems. Encourage your child to verbalize their self-perceptions and challenge them when they are unfairly negative. Offer more accurate positive statements that over time they will learn to internalize.
- **Create opportunities for success:** Healthy self-esteem is built upon successful experiences. Encourage your child to participate in activities that nurture their strengths and/or interests.
- **Teach your child problem-solving skills:** Knowing how to effectively approach challenges and implement solutions is an important skill for your child to develop. Teach them this simple five step approach: Identify the problem, brainstorm all possible solutions, evaluate the probable outcome of each solution, choose and implement the best solution, evaluate the outcome; and if unsuccessful try another solution.
- **Express your love:** Don't just think it, say it! Be genuine and express your positive feelings for your child both verbally and non-verbally (e.g., give a hug, smile, pat on the back, etc.). Create a safe and nurturing home. Help your child feel special and appreciated.

Our self-esteem is not static, but is continuously affected by our environment and life experiences. By helping your child develop a good sense of self early on, you will be helping them develop a protective buffer that will enable them to effectively handle the many challenges of life.