



Self Esteem

CONFIDENCE *Boost*

Nurturing a positive self-esteem is a cornerstone of parenting and yet it can be so fragile. So how can parents make sure their children grow up feeling good about themselves, writes Directions psychologist Jutta Dempsey

Self-confidence and self-esteem are two terms that are often used interchangeably yet there is a subtle distinction. Self-esteem comes from feeling good about your overall self whereas self-confidence comes from knowing the things you are good and not so good at. Obviously one feeds into the other since part of having a positive self-esteem is having the self-confidence to accept all aspects of ourselves, both the positives and negatives with a smile on our face.

Parents are undoubtedly in the strongest position to assist in their child's self-confidence and thus their self-esteem. Here are some ways you can build their sense of self within the two environments where most of their development takes place:

Home environment

- Set limits within which they can feel secure whilst being able to take risks and experiment with life's choices. Show them that you are prepared to increase their levels of freedom as they prove that they can be trusted to make the appropriate choices.
- Giving them jobs and chores to do gives children a feeling of responsibility and confidence in their achievements. Even goals like being able to successfully use the microwave will help.
- Develop some goals together that are based on your child's strengths. For example, putting together a training program to help them get on the soccer team or practicing playing an instrument so they can join the school band. This enables them to understand how they can work towards a goal in incremental steps and it develops an "I can do it" attitude.
- Show them how to learn from mistakes as they take on new challenges.

School environment

The school environment obviously has a major impact on your child's self confidence and esteem. This is where they will learn about their abilities in the classroom as well as their ability to self-motivate, focus and deal with success and failure. The playground also greatly influences your child's confidence as they learn how to deal with so many differing personalities. However, given that you are not there with them how can you make sure their self-esteem is protected?

- [1] Monitor and direct your child's academic achievements so they don't fall through the academic 'cracks' without anyone noticing. There are lots of reasons this could happen including learning or emotional disorders or just being in the wrong learning atmosphere for them.
- [2] If you think your child is underachieving, be proactive and seek solutions before it affects their confidence rather than adopting the 'wait and see' approach.
- [3] If they are not doing something to their potential eg. reading, find out what the problem is and provide the correct support to ensure that they learn quickly and move onto more complex learning tasks rather than getting stuck.
- [4] Teach your child social skills so they can deal with the different social challenges they face. If they're having social difficulties, have those conversations and refer to professionals for help if necessary.
- [5] Let your child know that nobody is perfect and that we all have different strengths and weaknesses and allow them to acknowledge the reality of their actual performance, "I am good at maths, but not very good at English."