

Self-esteem is the value we place on ourselves. It is the feeling we have about all the things we see ourselves to be. It is the knowledge that we are lovable, we are capable, and we are unique. Good self-esteem means:

- having a healthy view of yourself,
- having a quiet sense of self-worth,
- having a positive outlook,
- feeling satisfied with yourself most of the time,
- setting realistic goals.

Both adults and children benefit from good relationships, experiences and positive thinking. Many of the steps necessary for building a child's self-esteem will also help you in developing and maintaining your own.

As a parent, you have the greatest influence in shaping your children's sense of self-worth; you are their first and most important teacher. Their self-esteem is further influenced as they develop relationships with other family members, school teachers, friends and other adults.

LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE

Showing children that they are loved and accepted simply because they exist is the first and most important step to building a healthy self-esteem. Children need to get the message that they are worthy of love (even if they behave badly sometimes) from the most important adults in their lives – their parents. You must remember to:

- give love with no strings attached,
- show love and acceptance through your daily expressions of affection, care and concern,
- spend time together – play, work and relax together,

- show that you feel good about them by hugging them,
- tell them often, “I like what you did/said” and “I love you.”

A SENSE OF BELONGING

Children need to know that they are important. When they feel accepted and loved by the important people in their lives, they feel comfortable, safe and secure, and open to communication. If children feel respected and secure within a family, they will find it easier to make friendships outside the family. To help children develop that sense of belonging, you can:

- help them build valuable family and community relationships,
- encourage pride in their family's ethnic background and heritage,
- keep reminders of family events and family history around the home (photograph albums, home videos, etc.).

SECURITY AND SAFETY

Children must have their basic needs met if they are to feel safe and comfortable. A sense of security and safety allows them to take the next step: to try new things and to learn about themselves.

When children feel safe, they are less likely to be afraid of failure and more likely to risk trying again when they fail. Through this process, they are able to experience success. As their parent, you should try to:

- provide a safe physical environment,
- set and enforce clear rules and limits,
- be realistic in your expectations,
- encourage them to say “No” to negative pressures.

TRUST

A stable environment they can depend on provides children with a sense of security. It is important for children to learn that their actions have consequences. Knowing that you can be relied upon to be consistent and to give help when necessary helps children to think, “I can trust you, and I can trust myself.” To build this kind of trust, you should:

- be consistent so they know what to expect,
- be sure your verbal and non-verbal messages agree,
- be honest about your feelings to yourself and to the children,
- treat each child fairly.

RESPECT

Children will develop respect for themselves and for others if they learn that what they think, feel and do is important. If you put them down or call them demeaning names, your children will feel unworthy. Criticism or punishment which is too harsh will prevent children from developing self-confidence. By accepting your children's right to have feelings, you can help them learn to respect the feelings of others. If you teach your children healthy ways to express their feelings, they will learn to develop positive relationships. When dealing with your children, you should remember to:

- accept what they are feeling even if it is different from your own feelings,
- show respect for their feelings, beliefs, actions and individuality by listening with sincere interest,
- make “I feel” or “I believe”, rather than “You are”, statements when you do have to tell children what they are doing is wrong.

FEELING SPECIAL

We are all special. It is important for you to help your children discover their own special talents and qualities. Once they do identify what makes them special, they need to learn to value their own strengths. Remember to teach your children that feeling special does not mean feeling better than others; rather, it is a positive understanding of their own uniqueness. You should encourage children to:

- value their uniqueness,
- be optimistic,
- have a cheerful attitude (remember to set a good example),
- try things their own way,
- understand that trying your best is more important than winning.

CONFIDENCE

It is extremely important to give children support and approval. Children who have faith and confidence in themselves and their abilities will be more likely to lead happy and productive adult lives. Teach your children to learn from their mistakes, to work towards a goal, and to have pride in their successes. You should:

- encourage them to face challenges and take risks,
- teach them to make decisions and to set goals,
- express faith and confidence in them and their capabilities,
- provide opportunities for them to take responsibility for their actions,
- help them recognize that there are things they must accept and things they can choose to change,
- give them an opportunity to succeed.

DO YOU NEED MORE INFORMATION?

There are many books written for teachers, health professionals and parents, that provide information and ideas on helping to build children's self-esteem. You can also contact a local community organization, such as the Canadian Mental Health Association, to find out about workshops and other programs available in your community.

The Canadian Mental Health Association is a nation-wide, voluntary organization that promotes the mental health of all and supports the resilience and recovery of people experiencing mental illness. CMHA accomplishes this mission through advocacy, education, research and service.

Visit the CMHA website at www.cmha.ca today.

CHILDREN AND SELF-ESTEEM



MENTALLY HEALTHY PEOPLE IN A HEALTHY SOCIETY



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