

Parenting Pointers

Parenting Tips on: Building Positive Self-Esteem!

Nancy Almond, EVICS Coordinator

Parents have a tremendous opportunity to impact the development of their child's self-image. Our *self-image* is how we *see* ourselves and it forms early in life through verbal and non-verbal, conscious and unconscious, parent-child interactions. Children who are loved by their parents unconditionally will learn self-acceptance and self appreciation, both of which contribute to building positive self-esteem.

Self-esteem, is how we *feel* about how we see ourselves. Positive or negative, self-esteem is learned from the attitudes reactions and behaviors of the adults around us when we are young. If parents and other adults are positive in the way they feel about themselves, and express feelings of self-worth, they will be better able to help children develop positive self-esteem. A child with healthy self-esteem is less likely to engage in negative life choices such as drugs, alcohol and violence. Parents are the single greatest influence on their child's self-esteem.

Indicators of positive self-esteem are a willingness to try new things, share with others, accept other's viewpoints and perspectives, and develop lasting relationships. Children with positive self-esteem are more attentiveness at school, tend to show an inquisitive nature, are willing to lead *or* follow, and are comfortable with their individuality.

Some indicators of low self-esteem are a lack of self-confidence and self-respect, insecurity, poor school achievement, avoidance of others and difficulty in forming and maintaining relationships. A child with low self-esteem may allow himself to be picked on, act out to get attention, and behave rudely or disrespectfully. Low self-esteem can lead to poor sleeping habits, eating disorders, drug and alcohol abuse, and depression.

Here are some tips for helping your child develop positive self-esteem:

Catch your child "being good"! Often parents only react when their child does something wrong rather than taking the time to notice and reward the positive. Make a point of finding something to praise everyday. But be sure to make your praise genuine and not excessive without regard to the reason.

Give your child undivided attention. Parents sometimes pretend to listen or ignore children's attempts to communicate. Show your child you value what they have to say by listening to their ideas, opinions and feelings.

Keep expectations realistic. Recognize that each child is an individual who will develop at his or her own pace. Adjust your expectations to the child's age, temperament, and background. Avoid basing your expectations on your unfulfilled wishes and values, rather than on your child's wants and needs.

Create a safe, nurturing home environment. Make your home a safe haven for your family. Avoid arguing or fighting with your spouse in front of your child, and establish house rules about how disagreements will be handled.

Choose your words carefully. Children are very sensitive to parents' words. Remember to praise your child, not only for their performance, but also for their effort. During times of disappointment or crisis let your child know that your love and support remain unchanged.

Offer choices. Whenever possible, allow children to make choices appropriate to the age level. Allowing children to experiment, make mistakes and learn in non-threatening, situations helps build confidence.

Do good deeds. Teach your child, by example, to say and do good deeds. It builds strong character and produces positive feelings of self-worth.

Information in this article was provided by *Estes Valley investment in Childhood Success (EVICS)* with permission from *Partners in Parenting, Colorado Family Education, Resource & Training, CSU, Cooperative Extension*.

EVICS offers free childcare referrals, parent information and resources, and childcare provider support and training in the Estes Valley. For more information call 586-3055 or email evics@frie.com