

Nurturing Your Children's Self-Esteem

From the Parent Involvement and Support Department of San Diego City Schools

When asked what the concept of “self-esteem” really means, most people respond that it has something to do with “the value and love one has for oneself”. Parents hold an important and powerful position when it comes to building their children’s self-esteem by offering help and support to them as they face new and challenging experiences. It is very important for parents, the most important people in a child’s life, to express confidence in their children’s ability to be successful everyday. Receiving regular positive messages from parents enables children to believe in themselves, take more risks (social and academic) and experience more successes. Having a stockpile of successes serves to buffer any inevitable disappointments and setbacks. While having a positive self-image will not remove all the problems from children’s lives, it will help prepare them to handle problems better. When children face a difficult challenge and successfully negotiate it, their self-esteem grows which in turn prepares them to handle the next situation with more confidence. In short, regardless of circumstances, being successful in life is possible when one has a good positive self-image.

Here are ten ways to nurture your children’s self-esteem:

1. **Recognize and reward positive behaviors.** Catch your child “being good” and immediately offer specific praise and recognition for a job well done. Children will repeat the behaviors they get attention for, so make sure you are reinforcing positive behaviors. Consider granting special privileges or responsibilities for children who demonstrate positive behaviors without reminders. Show how much you care about them. Emphasize the good things they do.
2. **Be a good role model.** Actions do speak louder than words. Children learn by watching how you handle problems. Practice what you preach. Show your children that you feel good about yourself and let them see that you too can make mistakes and learn from them. Discuss your opinions and values and share the experiences that contributed to your beliefs.
3. **Define rules and limits clearly.** Enforce them. Allow leeway for your children within these limits.
4. **Take children’s ideas and feelings seriously.** Don’t belittle them by saying, “You’ll grow out of it” or “It’s not as bad as you think.” Instead, listen carefully to identify and validate their feelings by saying something like, “I understand you are feeling (sad, angry, frustrated, etc.) and is there anyway I can help?”
5. **Discuss problems** without placing blame or commenting on a their character. Listen and help your children to *not* feel attacked when discussing situations.
6. **Have reasonable expectations for your children.** Help children to set reachable goals so they can achieve success. Help them understand how to break down large tasks into smaller attainable steps, so they can experience a sense of accomplishment more frequently. Otherwise they can become overwhelmed and be tempted to quit which will diminish self-esteem.
7. **Help children develop tolerance and appreciation** for people with different backgrounds, cultures and values. Point out and discuss other people’s strengths.
8. **Assign children responsibilities,** which helps them to feel useful and valued as contributing members of the family.

9. **Show them that what they do is important to you.** Talk with them about their activities and interests. Go to their games, school presentations, award ceremonies and other activities held at the school. Be available and interested.

10. **Teach your children how to deal with time and money.** Help them to spend both time and money wisely. Knowing how to manage time and money wisely builds self-esteem and independence.