



A Parent's Guide to Building Self-Esteem

What is Self-Esteem and Why Does it Matter?

Self-esteem is a term we use to describe how a person feels about themselves, such as their sense of self-worth or personal value.

A person's self-esteem develops over time, but it is fluid, which means it can go up and down. It is important to teach children about the actions and activities they can do to improve their self-esteem. Having a healthy sense of self-esteem is important as it has an impact on motivation, resilience, and ability to succeed. If someone has low self-esteem, generally they will have negative feelings about themselves and may believe they are not worthy of success, love, or happiness.

How to Build Self-Esteem in Your Child

BUILD A BIDIRECTIONAL BODY-EMOTION RELATIONSHIP

If we feel happy, we naturally smile as a response to that feeling, which means we adjust our body. The opposite is also true. When we change our body posture, this affects how we feel. Research has shown that when people pose for two minutes in a Wonder Woman or Superman pose, it decreases stress hormones and increases hormones associated with confidence.

Therefore, consistently practising confidence-building postures and movements with children can help them improve their confidence over time.

FOSTER A GROWTH MINDSET

Growth mindset is the belief that intelligence and ability can be developed and changed. People with a growth mindset embrace challenges, persist through setbacks, see the value of effort, learn from criticisms, and find lessons and inspiration in other's success. Fixed mindset, on the other hand, is the opposite. People with a fixed mindset believe they are incapable of change; they are the way they are. They avoid challenges, give up easily, don't value effort or feedback, and feel threatened by another's success.

One way to foster a growth mindset is by noticing the ways you praise your child. Notice and praise the effort, choices, steps, and strategies a child takes rather than their talent or intelligence.

That's a creative way to solve the math problem. How did you come up with that strategy?

vs

You'd have to be really smart to get that answer right.

Another way to foster a growth mindset is by harnessing the power of yet. By saying the words yet or not yet, challenges or so-called failures become learning opportunities. Yet opens a world of possibilities and encourages processes, strategies, and effort that can lead a way to improving or reaching a goal.

Fostering a growth mindset helps build self-esteem because it widens the view of opportunity and builds motivation for a person faced with challenges. Growth mindset praises qualities about a person that they can control, rather than qualities that are believed to be inherent to a person, such as intelligence or talent.

I don't have friends yet at my new school, but I can get to know people and will make friends.

VS

I'll never make any friends.

PRAISE THAT BUILDS SELF-ESTEEM

Descriptive praise is often more effective than just saying "good job" or "nice work." A formula for descriptive praise looks like this:

- Describe. Describe what you see and what you feel.
- Label. Give a label that values your child's actions.
- Praise. Offer the child that final "pat on the back" or high-five.

So, what does this look like?

I see you set the table. It makes me feel special and happy to know you took the time to put everything out nicely (Describe). That is taking initiative (Label). Thank you for being so helpful (Praise).

When you label the actions you are praising, you create indisputable connections between your child's positive actions and positive qualities that they can look back on. Lastly, it is important to praise their efforts and not just the end result.

It's great to see you enjoy reading books even when it can be hard to read them.

DEVELOP POSITIVE SELF-TALK

How we talk about ourselves and how we think about ourselves matters. Positive self-talk gives us space to be compassionate and understanding toward ourselves. Positive self-talk helps to reframe ideas about ourselves and also how we approach stressful situations. This is closely linked to a growth mindset. Practising positive affirmations can also develop self-esteem and turn negative thoughts into positive ones. Remember, these skills don't come easily or naturally and take work to develop. They may feel awkward, but like other skills, it gets easier with practice. The purpose of this practice is to train ourselves so these thoughts become more natural. Therefore, it's best to make affirmations personal, age appropriate, and ones that can develop over time. Encourage your child to pick their strengths, or the strengths that are important to them, to guide their affirmations.

Here are some examples of affirmations:

- I am brave.
- I am loved.
- I will always do my best.
- I believe in who I am.
- I choose to surround myself with supportive people.
- I believe in myself and I believe in my capabilities.
- Today, I am going to trust myself and my instincts.
- I am good enough, and I am fine with just being me.

Lastly, be aware of toxic positivity, an attitude that creates the expectation that we need to be happy all the time. Toxic positivity is based on the belief that people should think positively about all experiences all the time; it dismisses challenges as well as negative thoughts, experiences, and feelings that impact a person's life.

By contrast, acknowledging negative thoughts and experiences is important in the process of building self-esteem and resilience.

An example of toxic positivity is when a person responds to someone who is saying they are feeling sad or overwhelmed by asking them to focus on the good things in their life (or compare themselves to others who are less fortunate), instead of paying attention to and acknowledging the things that upset them. While this approach is typically intended as strategy to promote positive thinking, it can also mean asking someone to believe in something that is not an accurate reality. In fact, they are being told that it is more important to avoid causing discomfort in others than to validate their personal experience.

AboutFace is here to encourage and support you and your children through your journey of building self-esteem. We offer programs that connect youth living with a facial difference and help you gain the confidence and courage you need to live life to the fullest. You and your child can reach out to us at any time.



A B O U T F A C E ®

Who We Are

AboutFace is a national charity and our mission is to cultivate equity and opportunity for individuals with a facial difference through supportive programming, advocacy, and education.

If you would like more information or support, please contact us or visit aboutface.ca.

51 Wolseley Street | Toronto, ON | M5T 1A4

TF 1.800.665.3223 | P 416.597.2229 | F 416.597.8494 | E info@aboutface.ca | aboutface.ca



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