

Things Parents Can Do To Nurture, & Set Limits

Self-esteem is one of the most misunderstood concepts facing parents today. Most understand that it refers to how a child thinks and feels about him or herself, but few understand the key determining factors. In the past we have gotten mixed opinions about what leads to high or low self-esteem, and many parents have been given conflicting information and advice. The purpose of this section is to provide a list of simple things to do in order to bring up confident kids. Confident kids need both nurturing and limits set. The following are simple ways to make sure your child gets both of these elements and therefore feels truly loved. Steps one through nine focus on clearly conveying nurturance. Step ten shares some specific ways to effectively set limits with your child.

1. Spend time with your children. A child learns to value his or herself by being valued. There is no substitute for time. Where you spend your time, clearly tells a child exactly how they rate. If you must work long hours, set aside time each day to spend one on one with each child. Quantity is not as important as quality. Make an effort to help each child feel special. Do equally intimate, but unique activities with each child. Sameness is not the goal here, being unique and special is what you want to convey. Creativity with your one-on-one time is essential. Share ideas with others, or get professional help. A child's attention span is 5 minutes. Adult attention span is 30 minutes. Your child needs 5 minute spurts of completely focused attention. Mute the television and connect during commercials. Let the show in-between recharge both of your attention span. Rotate your children each commercial, but don't let them interrupt each others time. Six five minute focused spurts conveys much more nurturance than 30 minutes straight. ADD children really need focused time, and then time when they don't get undivided attention and must entertain themselves.

2. Hug your children often. Physical contact is very important to a child's sense of well being. Recent and past studies all confirm that physical contact is essential for the proper development of self-esteem. Hug your child even when they pull away from you. You are not going for the moment of the hug, you are going for the moment after the hug. That's when your child thinks to him or her self, "Mom or Dad loves me".

3. Be optimistic. Try to see the glass as half full instead of half empty. Optimistic children are usually a result of optimistic parents. Critical or pessimistic parents raise negative thinking children. An optimistic outlook on life contributes to high self-esteem and a positive attitude in children.

4. Help your children explore their talents. Every child becomes good at things when they are encouraged and nurtured. This means creating many opportunities for them to explore and develop their talents. Don't do things for your child. Help structure activities so your child will follow through and develop mastery.

5. Help your children hang in there with new activities. It takes time, practice, and hard work for kids to get good enough at a new task to really begin to enjoy it. The first time you draw a picture is not very rewarding. The first time you play a sport is probably not that fun. Teaching your child to persist at different tasks is one of the most effective ways for children to build their own self-esteem. Focus on rewarding persistence not the outcome of a task.

6. Be honest with your child. Do not lie or flatter your child. Grossly exaggerated compliments or a false statement about your child's abilities undercuts his or her self-esteem. A child knows a sincere compliment from flattery. Flattery makes a child think, "I'm such a loser that now mom and dad are lying to me to try and cover up what they know is obvious." Honest compliments mean much more than any false statements. Be creative, focus a child on their strengths when they're down, and help them put setbacks in perspective. The common mistake that many parents make is that they are in such a hurry to take away their child's pain that they try to lie instead of working through the

setback with their child. This does not allow the child to learn from the experience to grow stronger and more confident. Help your child see the situation with optimism, not inaccuracy.

7. Don't remove competition from your child's life, just help put it in perspective. Competition is a part of life, if you shelter your child from competitive situations it will devastate them when they suddenly are thrown into a situation where they perceive that they don't measure up. Competition that recognizes and celebrates uniqueness and progress is positive, while competition that recognizes only "the best" is negative. Teach your children to view others as unique people with unique strengths and they will learn to view themselves in the same way. Try to teach them that they are not better or worse than others, simply unique.

8. Encourage your child to take risks. Only by taking chances and trying new things do kids have an opportunity to succeed. One of the signs of low self-esteem is an exaggerated fear of new situations and activities. Success builds more success and reduces fear of new situations. Reward your child for taking on new activities, tasks, and hobbies.

9. Allow your child to change activities but not just quit. If they persist at a task, but find that they are not getting any satisfaction from it even after considerable effort, you then encourage them to take what they've learned from the experience and apply it to a new task. Switching directions is very different than quitting, especially when it comes to self-esteem.

10. Set clear, consistent and fair limits with immediate consequences. Children with no limits or discipline are terrified and become insecure. They have no idea what is expected of them and must test their parents unclear boundaries by acting out. Then a child misbehaves, separate the child from the behavior. This does not mean go easy on the child, just don't focus on the child's character while following through with immediate, consistent, and fair consequences. Always explain to your children that you love them, but that you have to discipline them so they can learn from their mistakes.

Consequences:

Time Out:

1) Time out has one goal...to bore your child out of their mind. The more boring the more effective it is. The bathroom is one of the most effective time out places in the house. (If they have to go to the bathroom they are right there. If they need a drink it is right there. This eliminates two of their favorite interrupting time out techniques.) For really young kids you will hold them on your lap on the closed toilet, or stay in the bathroom during the time out for safety reasons with a 3-5 year old. Toys are only brought in at bath time. Do not talk to your child during time out. This entertains them and rewards them. There will be plenty of time to explain everything after they are good and bored first. Time out should last as long as it takes for the boredom to become painful for the child. It also does not start until the child settles or quiets down. You can begin as young as 18 months with this technique. (Obviously you would hold an 18 month old quietly (no talking during time out) until you sense they are getting the boredom message. You will judge this time by their squirminess. Let them squirm for a few minutes before talking to them or soothing them with your voice. When done consistently a child will learn very quickly to calm down, obey, and cooperate. Remember, do not talk, argue, or answer questions until after the time out time is completed. Explain these rules before issuing the time out to kids who are old enough to understand. Simply demonstrate this with younger kids. Explain after to kids of all ages, even if you don't think they can understand. You might be surprised how much even really little kids get.

Silent TV:

1) Buy a headphone breakout box from Radio Shack that turns your headphone jack on your main TV into four headphone jacks.

2) Buy four sets of cheap headphones with 10 foot extension cables that can plug into the breakout box.

(If you have extra money, wireless headphones work best.)

3) Make sure all TVs except the main TV are not able to be watched by your child who is in trouble. Lock the TVs in an off limits room like your bedroom or a closet, get rid of extra TVs, or control them from being turned on electronically with a V-chip device.

4) Now they are allowed in and out of the living room while the rest of the family watches TV with sound. This is easy on the parents and hard on the child. (The perfect consequence) They get to watch their siblings enjoying TV with sound. This will drive them crazy and motivate them to change their behavior. Once they do what you require (homework, chores, etc.), you can then unplug the box and everyone can watch TV with sound. You can sentence your child by the show, by the hour, by the day, etc. Whatever is the appropriate punishment time for the inappropriate behavior. Silent TV works for preschoolers all the way up to high school seniors.

Sunday To Sunday List:

From about second grade through high school kids learn like little lawyers to find the loophole in your discipline plan and make your efforts ineffective. One of their favorite techniques is to throw out a decoy when they get in trouble. They make up something and pretend like they want to do it so you as the parent will take it away. They then keep what they really want to do a secret and spring it on you when they think their odds are high of putting it past you. All kids do this. You probably even remember doing this as a child.

Knowledge is power, and your child doesn't want you to know what they value, because then you would have a menu of things to take away when they act out and things to allow them to do when they behave. The "Sunday to Sunday list is designed to put this power back in parent's hands where it belongs.

- 1) Print out a sheet on your computer with Sunday through Saturday down the page with about an inch of blank space under each day.
- 2) Tell your son or daughter to write everything they might want to do under each day for the entire week. This includes TV shows, sports practice, places they want to go, social events, activities, etc.
- 3) Tell them it is in their best interest to error on the side of including everything they might want to do.
- 4) If they only write two activities under each day, they will learn the hard way the first week for not putting more effort into the task.
- 5) After they complete the task you will look over the list and approve the activities. Cross off anything inappropriate or illegal.
- 6) Now if they are respectful and cooperative, you will make an effort to allow them to do as many activities as is reasonable. Because they listed it doesn't necessarily mean they are guaranteed to be able to do everything on the list, but if they are doing the things you expect you will make every effort to help them do the things on their list. When they are behaving they can even spring things on you at the last minute that aren't on the list. Basically they are allowed to do what they have been doing before the Sunday to Sunday list was implemented.
- 7) However, if they disrespect others or refuse to do the things you expect them to do, the list freezes and they can't spring anything on you at the last minute. This takes away their decoy power. You also now have a list of all their possible rewards, and a byline veto pen to cross any activity they value off as a consequence.

- 8) Try to cross things off the list for the same day that they misbehave. For example, if they mess up on Monday, take away something for Monday night. Once you cross something off the list it is gone for the whole week. If they put it back on next Sunday that is O.K., but never put something back on the list that you took away. No exceptions to this rule. This will simply teach your child to manipulate things back onto the list rather than change his or her behavior. Even if you think you were too harsh, error on the strict side and loosen it up next week.
- 9) This also helps parents stay consistent and support each other in the area of discipline. Even divorced parents can send this list back and forth with their child to maintain consistent follow through with consequences. Seeing what you have crossed off is a reminder that you are conveying love to your child by setting limits.