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WAYS TO HELP CHILDREN FEEL GOOD ABOUT THEMSELVES

Have you ever asked yourself "What can I do to help my children feel better about themselves... feel more confident ... view life more positively?"

The answer is not a simple one. Positive self-esteem is a key to happiness and well being in life. The following techniques can help to build high self-esteem in children.

Check out your own feelings of self worth. Parents need to feel secure and good about themselves before they can help their children reach this same goal.

Give each of your children undivided attention. Take time for each of your children individually. By focusing your full attention on your child you convey love by saying, "I care and I have time for you."

Constant, intense involvement is not necessary or realistic. The important thing is to let your child know he/she can count on this kind of attention at regular intervals. It may be necessary to set up a definite time for these "get togethers".

Be realistic in your expectations. Your expectations should be based on your child's age and personality. When your expectations are realistic your child is more likely to experience success and enjoy a feeling of accomplishment.

Look at your child as a unique person. Respond to and value each child on the basis of his/her own personal characteristics, not in comparison to brothers, sisters or classmates. When a child feels accepted and valued for the unique qualities that he/she possesses, a sense of well-being grows. Focus on a child's countless assets, rather than his/her shortcomings.

Be positive and honest with your child. As much as possible comment honestly and positively about what your child has done. Praise jobs well done.

If you feel you cannot comment honestly, you may be able to encourage with a general statements such as, "You've worked hard today. I appreciate it!"

Positive responses are conveyed not only by words, but also by actions. Warm smiles, happy hugs, and pats on the back help a child feel valued.

Avoid being a judge. How you respond to your child's behavior and express your feelings are critical in building up or tearing down a child's self image.

Think about how you normally respond to your child's behavior. If your statements frequently begin with "you", the statement probably includes both a reaction to the behavior, plus a judgment. On the other hand, if your statement begins with "I", you are most likely responding only to the child's behavior. For example, if your child's report card does not meet your expectations, "I'm worried about your grades" would be a better response than "Your grades are terrible. You are not applying yourself".

Encourage independence. Children build self-confidence when they help to make decisions and choices. Help to provide opportunities for decisions that are appropriate for the child involved. For example, allowing a very young child to decide what time to go to bed is not in the best interest of the child. At this early age a child has little concept of his/her physical needs. However, choices about what clothing to wear are quite appropriate.

All these techniques help to generate a positive, caring family environment, which in turn enhances the self-esteem of the children.