

Your Child's Self-Esteem

Tips From Lucas County Children Services

A child's emotional well-being is a critical part of her or his development into well-rounded adults. We are often reminded about the importance of disciplining our children, but affirming what our kids do well is just as – if not more – important.

As adults, we know how important affirmation from others is to our own sense of self. For children, who are still developing a sense of their importance and how they fit in, it's critical.

Here are some ways you can help your children develop a healthy self-esteem:

Celebrate Milestones

In addition to birthdays, graduations and other achievements, acknowledge your child's developmental milestones. This will give them the confidence to tackle the next one! Here are just a few –

- Rolling over
- Learning to walk
- First words
- Toilet-training
- Eating with utensils
- Dressing themselves
- Learning ABC's
- Learning to count
- Learning to tie a shoelace
- Riding a bike
- Learning to read



Say "I Love You"

Children need to hear this every day. Knowing that they are loved is especially important to children when they have misbehaved. Children need to know that it is their behavior – not them – you do not like.

Try this when you sense your child needs a "pick-me-up" (or anytime): Hold your child while you both look into a mirror. Say all of the reasons you love him. List his exceptional qualities or recount one of his recent accomplishments.

Use Sincere and Appropriate Praise

Use good judgment in acknowledging your child. Don't praise your child insincerely or for something trivial. Empty compliments can confuse children and make them wonder about your motive.

Let Them Contribute

Include children in family discussions and ask for their input when appropriate. When possible, let them make decisions for the family (i.e. what restaurant to eat at, what movie to see).

Give them responsibilities around the house, such as feeding



the family pet, setting the table, making their bed, or taking out the trash. It is important that these tasks are within their capabilities – for example, do not expect a 5-year-old to be able to cut the grass. Explain to them the importance of each family member completing their tasks for the benefit of all.

Showing that you value your children's opinions and giving them responsibilities will reinforce their role as important members of the family.

Parents Have The Most Impact

Children look to their parents for guidance. Particularly during a child's early years (up to 5 years of age), his or her parents have the most influence – positive or negative – on the development of self-esteem. Children who are routinely criticized will believe they can do nothing right. Kids who are encouraged and praised, however, will develop the confidence to meet new challenges.

Additionally, children tend to model those behaviors demonstrated by their parents. If parents have a healthy self-esteem, chances are their children will, too. Kids with a healthy self-image will be more giving and more complimentary. Conversely, parents who are too harsh on themselves or are pessimistic about the world may pass these qualities to their children.

Once they reach school age, teachers and classmates will begin to have a greater impact on how children feel about themselves. Kids who have a good self-image will have an easier time socializing and avoiding peer pressures.

Nurturing Environment

Create a home environment that makes children feel safe. Many children who live in homes where there is physical violence or constant emotional upheaval suffer from low self-esteem. A child whose parents fight repeatedly may become depressed and withdrawn.

Listen To Your Child

Listen to your children when they express their feelings, and respect their feelings. You may not always agree with the way they feel about something, but don't judge. No one, especially children, should be made to feel guilty about how they feel about something.

Instead, help them understand why they feel like they do. This alone may make them change their feelings.

Handling Disappointment

Life isn't always roses. When your children experience disappointment, first validate their feelings and then remind them that they have your love and support.

For instance, if your child is upset about not making the soccer team, don't say "Don't let it bother you," or "It's not worth worrying about." Instead, try "I'm sorry that you didn't make the team. I can see that you're hurting." Then, tell her you are proud of her for giving her best effort, which is the most important thing.

Seek Professional Help

If you believe your child has a serious self-esteem problem, don't be too afraid or embarrassed to seek professional help. There is no shame in asking for advice or seeking counseling – your child's mental health is too important.