

The Importance of Self-Esteem

From the beginning, one of the most important things parents can do for their children is to help them develop high self-esteem. Having high self-esteem is the foundation on which children build the rest of their lives. People with high self-esteem are capable of making good decisions and being proud of their accomplishments, willing to take responsibility, and able to cope with frustration. They are more likely to be creative thinkers, find ways to meet challenges, and take risks in new situations. All of these are traits we value in adults. The degree of self-esteem a child has is closely tied to his family and environment. From the moment a child is born, his parents begin molding his feelings about himself and his worth as an individual by how they talk with him, hold and care for him, and even by how they think about him. A child knows when he is listened to and taken seriously. If he feels he is genuinely cared for, his self-esteem will probably be high.

Self-Esteem and Decision Making

Success in school is heavily linked to a child's sense of self-esteem. High self-esteem has an even greater payoff over a lifetime of making decisions. Such critical decisions as whether to drop out of school, use drugs or give into peer pressure are all affected by a child's sense of self-worth. Parents need to foster their child's self-esteem, self-discipline, and ability to make decisions about who he/she is and who he/she wants to be. They may need to learn ways that help a child make decisions and then let the child live with the results of those decisions. In addition parents need to find ways to let their child know he/she is respected as an individual, just as he/she is expected to give others around him/her that same kind of respect. Parents also may need to acquire skills that enable them to provide discipline in a way that is positive—never negative or hurtful.

Parent Tips

Coaching Your Child on Decision Making

One way to help your child become better at making decisions is to become the “coach” and help him/her understand how to begin doing this. “A child who helps make a decision will be more willing to make that decision work.” Work with him/her in learning how to think through these steps to reach his/her own decisions:

- Discuss the issue of concern. Try to be thorough and objective.
- Decide what the problem is, and have him/her state it clearly.
- Find out if more information is needed in order to make the decision.
- List the choices available, making sure nothing is overlooked.
- Discuss the possible results of each choice. If necessary, have him/her make a list of good and bad points for each choice, keeping in mind both long-term and short-term results—list the possible benefits and consequences.
- Discuss how he/she will feel about each decision in terms of his/her own values and expectations for himself/herself and the values of the family.
- Reach the decision together, keeping in mind that younger children need more assistance and teenagers demand more independence. Children must be allowed to work through and live with the consequences of their decisions. They need praise for making good decisions, and they need to know you are proud of them. There may be times when you dislike or disagree with a decision that has been made. At these times, you must make it clear that you love your child, in spite of the decision.