

Building Your Child's Self-Esteem

By: Amanda Elias, M.A., Child Development Specialist

One of the most important things parents can provide for their children is a positive self-esteem. Unlike basic nutrition, clothing, and shelter, self-esteem is intangible and obtaining it requires parents to dedicate sustained effort throughout many years. Building a positive self-esteem can be a long process; however it is an extremely vital and priceless aspect of childhood development.

One of the easiest ways to build your child's self-esteem is to spend quality time with them. Knowing that they are important to you and a priority in your life will translate to self-confidence and a sense of self-value. Plan family activities where your child's choices and actions will be valued. For instance, if you are planning a family fun day at the park, let your child choose what to bring for lunch and let them help prepare it. Then while at the park, acknowledge how well your child made the lunch and how much you appreciate their contribution to the day. Reinforce their positive behavior with a little extra praise to instill a sense of achievement.

Secondly, remember that children are not perfect and neither are parents. Every member of a family will make mistakes and decisions that are regrettable. It is important that you incorporate sensitive humor when you make mistakes – Laughing with your child's stumbles, not at them. Emphasize that everyone makes mistakes and they are an opportunity to learn what to do better next time.

Just as mentioned in last month's article, Teaching Your Child to Handle Their Emotions Effectively, parents are a mirror to which their children look for reassurance and guidance. Children will gauge their future feelings upon seeing their parents' reactions to their current expressions. In an effort to promote a positive self-esteem, parents are advised to give more positive feedback than negative feedback to their children. It is a rule of thumb that for every negative comment a parent makes towards their child, it takes five positive comments to make up for it. Sometimes this is just a simple matter of semantics – Instead of saying, "Stop wiping your dirty hands on the wall", one might say, "Please go wash your hands." This changes the phrase from a criticism to a pleasant request. Many children require this structure and clear communication in order to respect discipline. It is important that you share with your children "what to do" rather than "what not to do". Keep in mind while disciplining your child that you must convey that your love for them is unconditional. Let them know that you love them, but you don't love a certain, specific behavior.

For more tips on Building Your Child's Self-Esteem you are invited to attend Amanda Elias's Meetup on Wednesday March, 25th at 6:30PM. Go to www.familiesbydesign.net to reserve your seat!