

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO TO IMPROVE SELF-ESTEEM IN THEIR CHILDREN



By Candis Ubiles, LCSW

Early in life, children are faced with the task of developing a sense of hope, competency, and secure identity. There are many hurdles to overcome, especially in light of a global pandemic and the national unrest in recent months. However, if navigated thoughtfully, these things can provide a strong platform for living healthy, successful lives as adults.

Roger Crooks, LCSW, a Certified Parent Educator for Advocates for Children in Education (ACE), developed a comprehensive list of simple yet powerful tools for improving your children's self-esteem in a way that will foster healthy identity long term.

1. Tell them why they are special.

Be specific when telling your children why they are special. For example, "Ella, you have shown such resilience and flexibility as you transitioned to online school. I'm really proud of your efforts."

2. Let them make age-appropriate choices.

Give your children choices. "Marcus, they are offering indoor soccer and basketball at the YMCA. You may pick either sport to play." Your child is involved in the decision-making, which results in greater investment in the activity and strengthens self-esteem.

3. Give them age-appropriate tasks.

Chores are great ways to build self-esteem, teach independent living skills, and even ease burdens at home. "Felicia, you are

responsible for gathering the trash every Wednesday and doing the dishes each night after dinner." These types of responsibilities create a sense of inclusion and importance within the family, resulting in increased work ethic and healthy family functioning.

4. Teach them how to handle disappointments.

Everyone faces setbacks and disappointments in life, and our children are faced with unique challenges today due to COVID-19. When faced with limitations on social opportunities, academics, and athletics, your children need to know that their feelings are natural and understandable but that opportunity also exists in these challenging times. Building the capacity of our kids doesn't have to be monumental. Just teaching them the value of exploring a new hobby or identifying a new way to "hang out" can go far in developing resiliency.

5. Encourage their creativity (and let them help clean up).

Children can take a blob of play dough and mold fun for hours just as they can with paints, crayons, and Legos. Encourage these activities, yet also teach the importance of cleaning up after themselves, which supports a sense of responsibility.

6. Be there at important events in their lives.

That 5-word part in the class play may seem small, but your presence and support will likely provide a springboard of confidence for them and be an act of love that they always remember. Being present to listen to your child's English essay or reading a book with him/her can validate your child.

7. Allow frustration to surface at times.

Think of teaching your child to tie his/her shoes. If you take over when the practice gets too frustrating, your child will never be able to master this task and secure the sense of accomplishment that often follows.

8. Give physical affection often.

A gentle touch of the arm or, better yet, a big hug can go a long way.

9. Ask for their advice or opinions.

You can ask for their opinion about simple things such as, "Mary, which tie do you think looks best? I can't decide."

10. Make eye contact with them when they speak to you; actively listen.

When we speak to our children, we should use the same communication skills that we use with our spouse, friends, and coworkers. This fosters a sense of mutual care and respect.

11. Plan quality time/special parent-child dates.

This is a particularly helpful tool to affirm your child's

importance in your family. Spend time with all family members together but also plan one-on-one parent/child dates. While our current environment has created many barriers for social interactions, it has also provided opportunities to develop more intimate relationships within the family unit. Playing a board game or going for a walk are easy ways to invest in your child.

12. Give them personal and private spaces.

Children need spaces and things that are their own. Allot them a personal drawer, bed bin, or small space where

they can go to when they need privacy.

13. Love them for who they are.

They are your children. Love them for who they are and remind them of this daily.

Parents have such an important and precious opportunity to build up their children and teens in many small yet powerful ways that can be profound and life-changing. Most importantly, though, is to believe what you say and support it through action. Your messages are the ones that will travel farthest in your child's journey through life.

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