

Self Esteem



Understanding and Fostering It in Our Children

All parents wonder about their children's self-esteem from time-to-time. Do they have it? Will it be there when things get tough in school and in life? We all want the best for our children. Fortunately, the latest child development research has taught us a lot more about self-esteem. We know what it is as well as how it develops in our children and what we can do to foster it.

Experts agree that acquiring a genuine inner self-esteem is the most important developmental achievement in a child's life. Self-esteem is a child's positive feelings about herself and is the center of her confidence. A healthy and stable self-esteem will allow a child to succeed in school and in all endeavors in life.

Traditional views of self-esteem are centered around the belief that it is generated by everyday activities such as success in after school activities, a winning hometown sports team, how many friends you have and what they think of you, or how good your grades are, etc. While these are certainly important and add pleasure to life, they are inherently loss-filled (i.e. your favorite team won't win

every game, someone will eventually get better grades than you, or you no longer want to play soccer after school, etc.).

Good feelings generated by success from external things are unstable. Since you can't control things outside yourself, you will always need another experience of winning to feel good about yourself and it is impossible to win every time. Ups and downs in life are inevitable. Smart Love presents a more constructive view of an internal self-esteem that is genuine, lasting and comes from a deep conviction of being loved, lovable, and loving. This inner self-esteem is unshakable, so that when something bad happens, your child's sense of self-worth remains stable. For example, a child with stable inner self-esteem will view a low grade on a test at school this way - "I'm upset I did poorly on my test. I guess I need to try harder next time." A child who has attached his good feelings about himself to external successes will view himself in any number of negative ways, such as "I am so stupid for not doing well on my test," or "I hate that class!" Permanent, internal self-esteem helps your child make good choices at home and school and avoid situations that cause her trouble. How does my child acquire this type of inner self-esteem? All babies are born with it and then look to their parents and caregivers to build and foster it. From birth, her very survival is dependant on our responding to her desires and needs. The most meaningful experience in a child's life is to believe that she has caused her parents to love caring for her. When parents respond to their baby's cries it strengthens that basic need. When we respond lovingly to her cries, or coo back and forth with our baby, she takes it in and feels loved and connected to you. Early on every baby and young child copies her parents and wants to be just like them. Not just how you walk and talk, but how you treat her and how you feel about

her when you are with her. We are all born to love whatever care we get and to want more of it. The way you treat your child is how she will treat herself and others.

As parents, we have a wonderful opportunity to foster our children's inner self-esteem. It is comforting to know that your child's self-esteem at any age does not need to be under the control of outside influences. When we can be understanding, kind and loving, children internalize this way of relating and carry it with them the rest of their lives. All these positive experiences get deposited in your children's "self-esteem piggy banks" that they will draw on to feel good about themselves when the going gets tough in school and in life. Regardless of how old your child is and what they are struggling with, parents can always build on their child's innate potential for positive self-esteem. It is never too late!

Self-Esteem Building Tips:

- Keep your relationship with your child free from conflict and power struggles
- Have as many positive experiences and enjoyable activities with your child as possible
- Set aside focused individual time with each child everyday
- Use "loving regulation" to manage children's immature, yet age-appropriate behavior
- Avoid timeouts, withdrawal of privileges or using consequences in managing behavior.

The Smart Love Approach was developed by Martha Heineman Pieper, Ph.D., and William J. Pieper, M.D., and is described in their book *Smart Love*. The Natalie G. Heineman Smart Love Preschool offers classes for three to six year olds, and parent and child programs for children six weeks to 36 months. Smart Love Family Services provides counseling for children and families based on the Piepers' therapeutic approach, Inner Humanism[®]. Parenting programs include private parent coaching, educational seminars (co-sponsored by the Intrapsychic Humanism Society), parent training and support programs, and publications. © 2015 Smart Love Family Services is an Illinois-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.