

Build Self-Esteem from the Inside Out

There are lots of ways to build confidence in children. It's an inside-outside job—our thoughts and our self-talk are powerful. When children feel good about themselves, they'll create positive self-talk. In other words, they will think of themselves as smart, nice, and capable, and that will show up in their can-do attitudes. They'll be ready to meet life's challenges.

Children Need:

- **A Safe Haven**

All kids need to feel loved, safe, and secure. This goes beyond the basic necessities of food, shelter, and clothing. It includes people and routines they can count on. They need a place to be themselves, a place where they can take risks and make mistakes.

- **Challenges**

Children feel capable when they accomplish new things. That's why they say, "Watch how high I can swing,"



Look how strong I am," or "I can read all by myself." It's progress that's important, not perfection—and efforts, not outcomes—that create a winning spirit and a confident child.

- **Encouragement**

They don't need constant praise, but they do need encouragement. It helps them become self-motivated. Praise teaches them to please others but can backfire when used too often. Encouragement is specific and acknowledges effort. "Thanks for being on time when I picked you up from school today." "I know you tried hard to get all of your spelling words right."

- **Nurturing**

They need a hand to hold or a lap to sit on when they are frightened, insecure, or just because. They need help with

all kinds of things from brushing their teeth to completing their homework. Feeling they are an important member of the family helps children create bonds with others.

- **An Enriching Environment**

A place to play and plenty of time to pursue their own interests is critical for young children. They're constantly learning when they're coloring, reading, riding a bike, or playing with blocks, cars, or dolls. They need an environment that includes laughter and fun.

- **Your Attention**

Once in a while, cell phones, newspapers, TVs, and computers must be put aside to give full attention to children. So much of what we say to them is instructional—"Put away your toys," "Don't forget your lunch," "Hurry up, we have to go"—that we must remind ourselves to talk and listen to them on a deeper level about things that are of interest to them. And, yes, we must make time to answer millions of questions.

- **To Feel Unique**

All children are unique and have strengths. They may not be athletic, musical, or a math whiz, and their individual interests may be different than yours, but they are special. Help your child understand what makes him unique. Is he friendly, curious about everything, an amazing artist, loving, a stand out student? Helping children understand their uniqueness is the opposite of comparing. Comparing your child to a brother, sister, neighbor, or friend is never a good idea.



All children are unique.



PERSONAL PARENTING

Read Aloud to Children

The benefits of reading aloud to children are far-reaching and remarkable. Make reading aloud a daily tradition in your family. Children need to be read to even after they have learned how to read.

Reading aloud

- Promotes bonding between parents and children
- Develops attention span and memory
- Helps children learn new vocabulary words
- Stimulates imagination and creativity
- Promotes academic success



One, Two, Three Nachos Please

- Tortilla chips
- 1 can (16 ounces) refried beans
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup chunky salsa
- 2 cups shredded cheese

1. Arrange the chips in a single layer on a microwave-safe plate.
2. Stir the beans, salsa, and cheese together and place a spoonful on each tortilla chip.
3. Microwave for 2 to 3 minutes, or until the cheese is melted.



It's Mine!

A toddler's favorite word is "mine." It's a typical stage of development, as sharing is not on a toddler's agenda. They simply can't see things from another's point of view, so naturally they want everything. Parents can pave the way (patiently) by using the words "share" and "borrow" in conversation. "Would you share your sandwich with me?" or "May I borrow your glue, please?" Improvement comes slowly as children grow and develop.

January Junk Box

To stimulate creative play, collect beautiful junk from around the house and place the items in a shoebox. All you need is glue and paper, and kids can craft fantastic collages. Supervise young children so they don't put small things in their mouths.

Here's a list to get you started: string, shells, lace, seeds, fabric scraps, popsicle sticks, stickers, cotton balls, buttons, twigs, pine needles, and small stones.



Hang Artwork at Eye Level

When we as adults walk into a room, we see pictures hung at our eye level. It would be difficult to appreciate a picture hung four or five feet higher, yet that's what we often do with children's art—we place it at our eye level, not theirs.

It's easy to make the change by placing mirrors, murals, and children's artwork a bit lower in their bedroom. Wow, what a difference!

When the Weather Outside is Frightful

It can be frightful out there—thunder and lightning, buckets of rain, howling winds, freezing snowstorms. When the weather chases the kids inside, it's best to have a plan to keep them occupied. Try these ideas and add your own to your bag of tricks.

DISCOVERY DRAWER

Babies get into everything, and so many things are off-limits or must be under lock and key. Why not give them their own drawer filled with safe things to explore? Fill it with fun, interesting items such as measuring cups and spoons, small bowls with lids, empty boxes, and old key chains. When you're busy, let your baby open the drawer and discover all the fun things inside.

Don't forget to add new items once in a while, and make sure everything is safe for them to explore.

WHAT-IF?

Children acquire language faster during the first five years of life than at any other time in their development. What a great opportunity to ask questions that require more than a yes-or-no answer. These questions also involve a little creative thinking!

What-If?



- What if everyone wore pajamas all of the time?
- What if there were no trees?
- What if you lived in a zoo?
- What if you had a monster for a pet?



Post it
Note Fun

Fine Muscle Workout

Toddlers enjoy pulling off the pages of Post-it pads one by one. They can stick the notes onto a cookie sheet and then “magically” take them off again. The notes can be stuck together again and reused at a later date. This activity is more than an amusement for children—it's also a super workout for small muscles that are so important in writing skills.

Make Mini Books

Older children can make tiny books from Post-it notes. They can create a sticker book or a book they can illustrate and read. When finished with the books, place the self-adhesive edges one on top of the other and staple them together.

Post-it Note Puppets

Draw faces on the Post-it notes and then wrap them around a finger for a paper puppet. Create a whole family and put on a Post-it note play.

HAVE A TREASURE HUNT



Hide something that children will love to find: a book, a special treat, some stickers, new art supplies. Draw a simple map to give them hints of where the hidden treasure is and then let them go on a search.

Hide things under a bed, behind a door, under a pillow, in the washing machine. A couple of rules will prolong this game and might even help with cleanup.

For example, one rule could be to walk when going from place to place. Another might be to put back anything disrupted. So if a pillow was moved, it should be put back in place.

CLIPBOARD