

problems on this assignment” is more constructive than “You never finish anything.”

- Ask your son what he thinks.
- Let your daughter be the one to choose the restaurant or movie or activity some of the time.
- Ask your son to go along with you on routine errands just because you want to spend some time with him.
- Touch your daughter when you talk to her.
- Give your son a hug at least every few days.
- Go in and say goodnight before your daughter goes to sleep. (This is easy to forget once she becomes a teenager.)
- Look up and smile when your son walks into the room.
- Introduce yourself when your daughter is with a new friend.
- Ask your daughter to tell you about the book she is reading or the movie she just saw.
- It is important to recheck your standards and expectations from time to time to be sure they are realistic for your children’s ages and individual abilities.
- Look for ways to maintain your own self-esteem. If you are unhappy, discontented, or disappointed in how your life is turning out, it will be difficult for you to build the self-esteem of your children.
- Every child needs to be the object of a parent’s undivided attention on a regular basis.
- Make certain that your body language matches your words. If they are out of synch, your children will be aware of it.
- Be yourself. Tell the truth.
- Be appropriate. You don’t have to say everything that is on your mind or tell your children things they aren’t ready to know.
- If you show that you accept yourself and your actions, you give permission to your children to do the same.

people (adults, children, and adolescents) feel better by identifying how faulty ways of thinking make them feel bad. Cognitive therapists believe that faulty thoughts cause us to feel bad, which in turn makes us feel bad about ourselves.

Review child development literature regularly to stay updated on what is normal at each age and stage.

WHERE CAN I GO TO LEARN MORE?

Branden, Nathaniel. *The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem*. New York: Bantam, 1994.

Briggs, Dorothy Corkville. *Celebrate Your Self: Making Life Work For You*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977.

David D. Burns, *Ten Days to Self-Esteem*. New York: William Morrow, 1993.

Sher, Barbara, with Gottlieb, Annie. *Wishcraft*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1979.

SEE THESE HANDOUTS ON RELATED TOPICS

- Building Positive Teen Relationships
- Helping Kids Manage Angry Feelings
- Positive Reinforcement (for Parents)

HOW DO MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS TREAT LOW SELF ESTEEM?

Every kind of psychotherapy is designed to improve the self-esteem of the client. Therapists who specialize in working with children and adolescents have a variety of methods that focus on the special needs of younger people. The experience of being listened to, empathized with, and taken seriously is an important component of every type of therapy and is a key ingredient in building the self-esteem of the client.

One of the most successful methods for helping people feel better about themselves is the process of **cognitive therapy**. Cognitive therapy helps depressed and anxious

How to Build Your Child’s Self-Esteem

WHAT IS SELF-ESTEEM AND WHERE DOES IT COME FROM?

Self-esteem literally means to esteem or respect yourself. Having high self-esteem means that you have a positive image of yourself. People are not born with these beliefs. They are learned during childhood and adolescence. These beliefs are based on:

- What others said about you
- What others told you
- What others did to you

A person’s self-image is the result of all of the messages he or she heard about himself or herself as a child. These messages added up to a set of beliefs about who he or she is. It may have nothing to do with who the person *really* is. For example, you may believe that:

- You’re not very smart.
- You’re naturally passive.
- Girls aren’t any good at math.



- You're too old to start over.
- All Hamilton women are doctors.
- You're painfully shy.
- The Van Dykes never lie.

There are hundreds of ways to convey the message "You are worthwhile" to your children.

In addition to learning to believe certain things during our early years, there are certain situations that make most people feel inferior or lacking in self-esteem. Some examples are:

- Being criticized
- Not being loved
- Being rejected
- Experiencing failure

WHAT DOES LOW SELF-ESTEEM FEEL LIKE?

In situations like those just cited, it is common to feel emotions such as:

- Sadness
- Inferiority
- Anger
- Jealousy
- Rejection

HOW CAN I BUILD MY CHILDREN'S SELF ESTEEM?

There are hundreds of ways to convey the message "You are worthwhile" to your children. This list could fill a hundred books, since the ways to raise responsible, happy children are limited only by our imagination. Here are some places to begin.

- Tell your daughter on a regular basis that you love her. Actually say the words. If you think, "I don't have to tell her. She knows," you are wrong. It doesn't count if you think it but don't say it out loud.
- Tell your son that you are glad he is your child. Say the words and mean them. If you don't feel it, there is

something wrong and you should find out what's going on. We all have moments when we have a hard time getting in touch with our positive feelings for our children. I'm not talking about those times. I'm talking about in general, most of the time, if you're not feeling good about being your child's parent, something is wrong. He will never feel good about himself if he senses that you are not connected to him.

Tell your child that you are glad he or she is your child. Say the words and mean them.

- Give your daughter an example to follow. Take the time to teach her the steps. Kids need models. It's unfair to expect that she will know what to do in her daily life if you haven't shown her how to do it.
- Spend time with your son. If you are absent most of the time, he notices, and he probably thinks it's because he isn't important enough.
- Look at your daughter when you speak to her. This conveys, "This is important and you are important."
- Look at your son when he speaks to you. This conveys, "What you are saying is important. You are important."
- Explain why. It takes more time, but it conveys to your daughter that she is important enough to you for you to spend the time helping her understand. When you explain why, you are also saying, "I understand that you need to know why. I am going to help you get your needs met."
- When your son tells you about something that happened, ask him how he feels about it. Take the time to listen to his answer.
- When you ask your daughter a question, encourage her to elaborate. Say, "Tell me more about that" or ask, "What was that like?"
- When you ask your daughter a question, don't interrupt when she is answering.
- When you ask your son a question, watch your responses. Don't disagree with or criticize his answer. Doing so teaches him that it isn't safe to be candid and will make him edit what he tells you.
- Take your child seriously.
- Participate in the driving. The kids whose parents never help with the driving feel bad about themselves.

When you ask a question, watch your responses. Don't disagree or criticize his answer. Doing so teaches him that it isn't safe to be candid and will make him edit what he tells you.

- Say no when you need to say no. Kids need to know there are limits and that some things are outside of those limits.
- When you say no to your child, explain why.
- When you say yes to your child, explain why.
- Set a positive example with your own behavior. You can only expect your children to behave with dignity and self-respect if they see you doing it.
- When you lose your temper or make a mistake, apologize. Say that you are sorry; be specific about what you are sorry for; and give your child a chance to respond.
- When you know that you have disappointed your son, acknowledge it. Ask him how he feels about it.
- Spend time alone with your child. Arrange activities for just the two of you.
- Ask your son what he would like to do.
- Give your daughter a private space where she can express herself.
- Respect your child's privacy.
- If your child did a good job on something, say so.
- If your daughter didn't do such a good job on something, point out what she did well.
- After a disappointment or failure, ask your child, "What did you learn from the experience?"

When there is a problem, focus on the issue, not the child.

- When you are giving your child feedback, describe specific behavior. For example, "I like how you asked the question so politely" or "You still need to pick up the towels off the floor."
- When there is a problem, focus on the issue, not the child. For example, "You didn't do the last 10