

Building self-esteem in children

By Bonnie Sherman, Extension Agent
Golden Plains Area/Phillips County

Raising children who feel good about themselves is an important part of parenting. Studies have shown that children with good self-esteem are happier; better at solving problems and less likely to be pressured into doing things they don't want to do. Children start to learn to feel good about themselves at a very young age. There are some important things parents can do when a child is very young to help them develop a positive sense of self worth.

Watch what you say. Kids are very sensitive to parents' words. Praise your young child not just for finishing the job but also for trying. It's not very important how well the job is done when a child is young, only that they tried and finished. Also, be specific in your praise. Make sure your child knows you are proud of what they accomplished and appreciate it. You can say something like, "You put all your dirty clothes in the basket. Great job"

Help children feel they are a part of something larger than themselves. Letting young children help around the house is valuable to them. Preschool age is a great time for children to take part in household chores. Provide them with opportunities for success; keep chores simple and age appropriate. Start with one step tasks like putting dirty clothes in the hamper or bringing a dia-



per to mom/dad. These are perfect jobs for a young child who wants to help. Add steps as your child grows. Doing simple tasks around the house helps young ones feel they're helping the whole family. Let them know it is appreciated.

Be a positive role model by fostering your own self-esteem. Don't be unkind or make negative statements about yourself; your child may copy this behavior. Make some time for yourself, enjoy time with friends, write a gratitude journal or read a good book to show children that you care about yourself. You can only give as much as you have. If your glass is only half full, that's all you can to give to your children.

Help children recognize and correct negative ideas about themselves. Self-doubt can take root early and become a reality for kids. It's easy for them to think that if they are a failure in one area, they are a failure in all areas. Help them develop their talents and capabilities. And even if they aren't good at something, praise and respect them for trying; they can keep trying if they enjoy the activity, it's ok.

Be generous with your affection. Hugs, kisses and pats on the back go a long way to boost your child's self-esteem.

Give positive, truthful feedback and love children unconditionally. Accept them for who they are and be honest with them. It's important for them to know they can trust what you say.

Create a safe, nurturing home environment. Kids who don't feel safe at home suffer enormously from low self-esteem. Also, watch for signs of abuse by others such as problems at school, trouble with peers and other factors you can tell are affect a child's self-esteem. Deal with these issues quickly and with understanding. And, always remember to respect your children.

Spend time with your child. Talk, listen and show interest in their friends, school work and games.

Develop boundaries. Children need boundaries to feel safe so be sure to set those that keep them from harm both physically and emotionally. To keep them emotionally safe, set rules about what they can watch on TV and when they are older, where they can go on the internet. Boundaries will be tested so tell your children the consequences of breaking a rule. When they are older, kids can help determine the consequences they will face when crossing boundaries that have been set.

Easy recipes especially for children to help make

- Peel a banana, dip it in yogurt. Roll in crushed cereal and freeze.
- Fancy sandwiches --- using cookie cutters cut bread into shapes and spread with favorite toppings (meat, cheese, peanut butter, etc.).
- Apple lips: Cut a crunchy, red apple for the lips into 8 slices, spread peanut butter or cream cheese onto the slices and apply marshmallows "teeth" onto the lips.

- Ants on a log: Fill a piece of celery with peanut butter or cream cheese. Place raisins on top for ants.
- Sprinkle Monterey Jack cheese over a corn tortilla; fold in half and microwave for 20 seconds. Serve with Salsa.

Active kids

By America On the Move

Encouraging kids to be physically active is a great way to develop positive self-esteem. When children master new physical skills, like learning to do somersaults they will feel as though they've accomplished something great. Encourage children to keep trying, even if they may have failed the first few times. Sticking with it will improve their self-esteem even more when they finally do learn a new skill. Have children try jumping rope, hopping in a circle on one foot and then reversing it, or doing a cartwheel. Ask your children to come up with other activities to try and learn. You'll be surprised by their imagination and creativity.

Be a good example and join in the fun. By showing children that you value your health, and by taking pride in being active, they too will share in this value. Go on after-dinner walks or bike rides together. Head to the park for a picnic and then toss a ball around together.



Thank you to Live Well Colorado for the support for the Spanish translation of Family Matters

Visit the Family Matters Web site at:
<http://www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs/fammatrs/fmmenu.html>

For more information, contact the Extension office nearest you, or visit our Web site
www.ext.colostate.edu

Articles in Family Matters are copyrighted, but may be reproduced in full without modification if credit is given to Family Matters, Family and Consumer Sciences, Colorado State University Extension. For all other requests, contact the author.

Extension programs are available to all without discrimination.



March 2009

Building self-esteem in children

Easy recipes especially for children to help make

Active kids



Colorado State University, U.S. Department of Agriculture and Colorado counties cooperating.