



EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Building Self-Esteem in Preschool

by Laurie Edwards, education.com

Building self-esteem begins in infancy, and by the time they reach the preschool years children already have the foundation for their self-esteem. However, parents and preschool teachers can do many things to build on that base so that your child retains a sense of self-esteem throughout his growth and development.

“Self-esteem comes from having a sense of belonging, believing that we're capable, and knowing our contributions are valued and worthwhile,” says Jane Nelsen, California family therapist and author of Positive Discipline. Children with good self-esteem are more resilient, weather storms more easily and perform with confidence because they expect positive outcomes. Want to help your preschooler build strong self-esteem early? Here's how:

Foster Feelings of Belonging

Although preschoolers are a little young to base their self-esteem on the way their peers treat them, they do know if they are being excluded. Teaching your child skills so he plays well and gets along with others can improve his self-esteem. Even more important, though, is how adults relate to her. When adults respect, listen to, and respond readily to a preschooler's needs, she feels loved and valued. She, in turn, will learn to respond to others that way.

Be a Role Model

Parents who have good self-esteem foster it in their children. If you feel comfortable with who you are, chances are good your preschooler will feel good about himself. Children are great imitators, so when they see the adults around them displaying self-confidence and self-assurance, they learn those behaviors.

If you laugh at and learn from your mistakes, your child will realize errors can be corrected. Preschoolers who can risk making mistakes are more willing to try new things, to experiment and to learn new skills, which increases their self-esteem.



Foster a Can-Do Attitude

When your preschooler works hard and succeeds, point it out. Don't just wait for him to reach his ultimate goal: celebrate small steps along the way by following these steps:

- Once he masters a skill, suggest a new one that will make him stretch a bit.
- Pick an activity that won't overwhelm him, one that's doable with a little extra effort.
- Reinforce the idea that he's capable as he masters each new challenge.

Even small victories make your preschooler feel confident and bolster his self-esteem.

Identify Strengths

Be careful about comparing your child with another. If your child expresses a wish to be like another child, respond by saying, "Yes, Hayden rides her bike fast, and you jump well. Can you show me how far you can jump?" Put the attention back on your child and what she does well. Always make the point that everyone has different skills, and each person is special.

Encourage Talents

According to Dr. Sally Sacks, psychotherapist and author of *How to Raise the Next President*, "One way to sponsor self esteem is to help children to occupy their free time in ways that are productive, and to encourage them to not only play with their friends, but to do something that creates a passion for them and a meaning in life."

The best way to do this is to encourage your preschooler's talents or abilities:

- Give your budding artist crayons and paper, sidewalk chalk, or finger paint.
- If your child excels in large-muscle activities, spend time playing sports together.
- Play CDs for a music lover and provide instruments he can play.

Emphasize having fun with the tools or sports equipment rather than excelling in the field. The process is more important than the final product. The goal is for your preschooler to experience joy and to feel competent rather than to become a child prodigy.



“Help your child to love and accept all parts of them, so that they may achieve wholeness, love and a lifelong connection to themselves and the world,” says Sacks. The connection to the world and the self-acceptance that accompanies it are vital to healthy self-esteem, and encouraging a preschooler’s self-esteem is one of the most valuable gifts you can give.