

THESE ARE A FEW OF MY FAVORITE THINGS

WAYS TO BUILD YOUR CHILD'S SELF-ESTEEM

LEARN TO COMPLIMENT YOUR CHILD

Praising a child is like giving them a “verbal trophy” and a child’s psyche has ample shelf space for such honors. Praise is best reserved for a child’s effort rather than for an accomplishment like a good grade or a win in a sporting event. We want to convey to children that our love for them is not contingent on their accomplishments. If a child begins to feel that he can only “earn” a parent’s love by getting certain grades or by scoring so many touchdowns, his self-esteem will be damaged and he may become very anxious, always wondering if his accomplishments are enough to please his parents.

Praising children for behavior that was difficult for them is especially meaningful. “I am proud of how quiet you were in church today. I know that isn’t always easy for you, but you did it today!” Also, praising a child for behavior you would like to see repeated is encouraged. “I know you could have hit Johnny when he threw the rock at you, but I’m really glad that you were able to stay calm and come and tell me instead.”

ASK YOUR CHILD'S OPINION

A big part of a child’s self-esteem is tied to sensing that his/her feelings are important to others. We, as adults, take such questions as, “What do you think?” and “What is your idea?” as commonplace in our daily lives at home and at work. However, these questions are rarely existent in relationships between adults and children. Not that children do not have thoughts and opinions to express – it is simply that many adults rarely ask.

A parent can really boost a child’s self-esteem when he turns to a child in the middle of a conversation and says, “What do you think?” or “How do you feel about that?”. Remember, do not criticize your child’s opinions. As opinions, they are as valid as those of anyone else. Be sure not to lecture your child on the unfeasibility of his/her ideas. By exploring ideas your child will form other ideas and will eventually come up with better

ideas. Ask you child, “What would happen if we did that?” or “Will that happen every time or just this time?” A child who is never asked for an opinion may be at-risk to become a teenager who is uncomfortable or unwilling to discuss issues like drugs, sex and life goals with parents.

A child with high self-esteem and confidence is a child who says, “My ideas have merit and my opinions are worth expressing.” These statements are translated into the child thinking, “I have value” and that feeling is the very heart of positive self-esteem.

ANSWER YOUR CHILD’S QUESTIONS

It is very important to encourage your child to ask questions. This conveys to your child that you “want them to know and you want them to grow.” You are valuing their right and desire to know. Your child will think, “Mom and Dad consider me valuable enough to teach and train me.” Always answer a child’s questions as honestly as you can. Saying, “I don’t know” is certainly appropriate if that is an honest response. On the other hand, such a response is not appropriate if it is used as a means to abruptly end a conversation with a child. A better way to handle such a situation might be to say, “Susie, I am trying to concentrate on something else right now. Can you ask me your question a little later? I want to have enough time to really listen to you.”

Children learn much when they ask questions and receive answers. Aside from learning facts and principles, they also learn that when you are willing to field their questions, you are valuing them and their inquiries.

LET YOUR CHILD BE THE TEACHER

One great way to enhance the positive development of you child’s self-esteem is to let him/her teach you something he/she knows. Children feel great when they know something well enough to teach it to someone they love. Your child could teach you just about anything. They could teach you to play a video game, tell you a story or show you how to throw a baseball.

The important thing for parents is to demonstrate curiosity about their children's world. It give kids the message that you value them and you appreciate them sharing their lives with you.

KEEP YOUR PROMISES

In large part, a child's self-esteem is only as good as the "truth" he/she perceives in the world. A child responds best to facts, solid answers and truthful descriptions of adults' feelings and intentions. Therefore, keeping promises to a child is very important. It puts a child on sure ground and conveys to a child that you value your relationship with your son or daughter enough to make an effort to do what you promised to do. It is a great act of love and is an example of truth to a child. It is as if the child thinks, "Mommy promised me we would go and we went. I can trust Mommy to tell me other things and they too will be true."

Certainly sometimes we cannot keep all of our promises. On these occasions, sincerely apologize to your children and ask them to accept your forgiveness. Children are able to understand an occasional broken promise. It is the chronic pattern of broken promises that is not easily forgotten or forgiven.

Promises are best limited to the concrete realm – places you will go, things you will do and items you will buy. These are the kinds of promises a child can really understand, anticipate and appreciate when they are kept. Do not promise to change your behavior. There is too big a chance that you will not be able to keep such a promise.

The best rule for promises is, if you do not intend to make a wholehearted effort to keep a promise, do not make it in the first place. It is generally better not to make any promises than to make them and break them.

SAY, "I LOVE YOU"

Do not assume that your children know that you love them and do not assume that all your praise,encouragement and actions are substitutes for saying those three critically important words: "I love you." Mean it when you say it and say it often. Make sure your children know that you loved them yesterday, will love them today and will love them forever. Let your

children know that you love them simply because “they are” and that your love for them is not contingent on a report card, test score or athletic achievement. Love is the foundation on which self-esteem is built and if children do not know and believe that they are loved, they will have difficulty believing that they have value as individuals.

Source: SEDOL; Revised: Judith Eckardt, SLP, Board Recognized Fluency Specialist, USA, 7/04