



Supporting my child's self-esteem

For our young people today there are more pressures than when we were younger. Social media and the internet does have huge benefits but also has a down side - if you have low self-esteem the number of likes you get can become debilitating to mental well-being. Educationally there are more pressures - some students view anything less than top grade as a failure. These pressures combined with low self-esteem reduce resilience and can lead to mental health issues.

So how can we support our children and young people to have good self-esteem. Well, it's not difficult. We should think about what makes us feel better about ourselves and more confident - positive reinforcement and encouragement. Research shows that positive, encouraging support always produces better results than negative support. Imagine you are having a job review. You are told you are appreciated, doing an excellent job and given some targets to work on, to improve. I suggest you would come out happy and motivated to improve. Compare this to being told you are the worst employee ever and that if you don't buck your ideas up you will be sacked. How motivated do you feel now? I would be looking for another job.

Here are some simple tips to support your child's self-esteem:

Don't say 'well done but.....'

Praise the achievement and leave it at that. Don't do that classic parenting thing of saying 'well done but imagine what you'd have got if you really tried' or 'well done but now you need to work on this'. Just say well done and leave it at that. Let them have their moment.

Do recognise all achievements

We all have different value systems. Make sure you recognise all your child's achievements even if you don't value them.

Do embrace failure

Failure is necessary in life. The best people have failed. Failure allows us to learn and do things differently, better next time. Embrace failure. Well done for trying - many people don't. What will you do differently next time. Failure is not the end point, it is a stepping stone.

Listen

Learn to listen to what your child is telling you. Believe them and acknowledge it. Don't tell them what they are feeling is wrong - it's their feeling not yours. Don't listen just to answer and tell them what to do. Listen. Understand them.

Don't compare with siblings or others

Every child is an individual with their own talents and abilities. I expect most of us have been compared to others at sometime in our life - seemingly to spur us on. But it doesn't work, does it? We just end up feeling bad about ourselves.

Do encourage independence

Try not to rush in and fix everything for your child when they have a problem. It's important that we develop our own problem-solving skills to be more resilient. We learn problem solving skills by practising. Use phrases such as 'what do you think you should do' and 'what can I do to help', or 'what other choices do you have'.

Do challenge

Boosting self-esteem isn't about praising everything your child does. "Well done for walking down the stairs." You can challenge, just pick the right time and try to use positive encouragement.

Do make sure they know they are loved unconditionally

Make sure they know your love is unconditional, don't presume it's obvious. Tell them. Often.