



THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-ESTEEM

Self-esteem refers to an individual's opinion of him or herself. People with healthy self-esteem trust their own instincts and abilities, believe that they are worthy of good things happening to them, and are confident that, with effort, they can accomplish any necessary or desired task. Unhealthy self-esteem can range from a dislike of oneself to an over-inflated self-opinion.

Research has shown that an individual's self-esteem strongly influences his or her interpersonal relationships, behavior, and learning. Unhealthy self-esteem has been linked to abusive and/or dysfunctional relationships, academic troubles, depression, and even violence and crime. Healthy self-esteem is important because individuals who are confident can cope better when things go wrong or not as expected. Confidence, and in turn self-esteem, grows when individuals experience success.

What to do if your child has low self-esteem:

1. To help your child develop healthy self-esteem, make sure to acknowledge your child's strengths and abilities. All too often, children on the autism spectrum are reminded (intentionally or not) of all the things they cannot do. Look for things, both small and large, that your child can do, and, when your child overcomes a previous challenge, celebrate your child's progress. However, don't be disingenuous with your accolades. Children don't benefit from false praise. No matter how impacted your child is by Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), your child has many, many qualities to commend without exaggerating achievements.
2. Make sure your child knows that there are people that care about him or her. Reassure your child of your love and point out other relatives, neighbors, and friends that care about him or her. Provide concrete examples of times when someone else went out of the way to be helpful or friendly. Also, teach your child how to reciprocate when another person is

outwardly friendly. Without being critical of your child, make sure your child understands that other people want to feel friendship in return. It is mutual admiration and attention that helps friendships to develop. If bullying is part of the cause for low self-esteem, work with your school, private therapists, and your child to end it and prevent it from reoccurring.

3. Find activities for your child to join which are in an area of particular interest and ability for your child. Consider having your child “tutor” someone else (perhaps a younger child) on how to complete a challenging Lego® creation, draw anime, or master a video game.
4. Teach your child coping strategies. Coping strategies include sharing, managing anger, resolving conflict, and dealing with stress. During times of disappointment or crisis, weakened self-esteem can be strengthened if you let your child know that your love and support remain unchanged. When the crisis has passed, you can help your child reflect on what went wrong. The next time a crisis occurs, your child can use the knowledge gained from overcoming past difficulties.
5. Model healthy self-esteem. If your child hears you constantly berating yourself for being overweight, not getting a desired promotion, or just not being good enough, your child will mimic your behavior. Definitely let your child see that everything doesn’t come easy for you; your child should know that you need to work hard to accomplish your goals. It is equally helpful for your child to see how you handle disappointment. Verbalize how you are feeling and follow up by expressing an action plan for how to improve for next time or how to make yourself feel better. Praise yourself for trying and not giving up.

What to do if your child has an over-inflated self-opinion:

1. Often an over-inflated self-opinion in an individual on the autism spectrum may be explained by difficulties in taking another person’s perspective. Individuals on the spectrum may simply not notice another person’s achievements or strengths. Help your child appreciate others’ talents by acknowledging a sibling’s accomplishment in front of your child on the spectrum. If your child reacts by talking about themselves, say that you are proud of them too, but that now is the time to celebrate your other child’s success.
2. Provide a structured environment. Sometimes the need for self-flattery

comes from a fear of the unknown. Your child may build him or herself up in an effort to convince him or herself that he or she can get through something.

3. Make sure the praise you provide your child is not overdone in light of the accomplishment. Praising your child for reading 20 books over the summer is overinflated if the books read are 3 grades below your child's reading level.
4. Encourage your child to try new activities, even if they present a challenge. Praise your child for trying something different and difficult, whether or not your child succeeds in the task the first time. Teach your child coping strategies in case things don't go as planned.
5. Point out examples in real life, books, or television where someone acted vain, narcissistic, or self-important and experienced a negative reaction. Discuss how the individual's behavior affected the behavior of others and ultimately prevented the individual from getting a desired goal.

Sometimes, it may be necessary to consult a professional counselor for help in improving your child's self-esteem. School counselors as well as private therapists have specific training in this area and are a great resource for you and your family.

Related Articles:

- [Self-Advocacy](#)
- [Bullying](#)

Additional Resources:

- [Keeping it Real Project Website for Individuals with ASD to Build Advocacy and Self-Esteem](#)
- [Building Confidence in Your Child with Autism Spectrum Disorder](#)
- [The Social Importance of Self-Esteem](#)
- [Importance of Self-Esteem in Young Children: You are the Key](#)
- [10 Strategies for Building Self-Esteem in Children with ADHD, Autism and Asperger's Syndrome](#)

