

Self-Esteem and Anger Control

Self-esteem is a multidimensional concept that directly relates to anger control. Ingredients to a positive self-esteem directly contribute to improved anger control. A child who has a poor self-image is at greater risk for frustration and disappointment. They are more vulnerable to situations of unfairness or provocation.

Self-esteem requires a sense of competence, confidence in one's abilities. Children who have a belief in their abilities are less susceptible to frustration. They are better able to persevere when they encounter difficulties and try different strategies or plans. They are generally more willing to ask for help when they need it, avoiding anger problems.

Self-esteem is based on successful experiences which validate our sense of competence and establish a positive identity. Such successful experiences help children learn that they can get what they want if they work hard towards their goal. With a history of success in handling frustrations and disappointments, a child with positive self-esteem is less vulnerable to anger triggers.

Self-esteem involves contributions to family, friends, and community. Such contributions are appreciated by others and develop a sense of connectedness which is a foundation to positive self-esteem. Contributions and connectedness lead to positive feedback and social interactions that enhance one's sense of worth and power. This obviously helps a child to handle frustrations and disappointments. They are less likely to view others as having hostile intent, helping to avoid anger issues related to unfairness and teasing.

Self-esteem includes the ability to establish realistic goals against which one's performance can be evaluated. A child with positive self-esteem learns how to set appropriate goals which are challenging and rewarding, but not so difficult as to lead to frustration. The ability to independently set realistic goals avoids potential anger problems.

A child with positive self-esteem considers feedback from others while learning to evaluate their own performance and behavior. A child with low self-esteem is vulnerable to negative feedback and is likely to be angered by criticism. They are disappointed when they don't receive the positive feedback they are expecting. A child with a positive self-esteem is not as likely to interpret negative feedback as an attack and is able to handle situations where they are singled out for comment or criticism.

Self-esteem must be built along multiple dimensions. There are many factors that contribute to a child's self-esteem. A child must have a sense of competence, a confidence in their own abilities. They must have successful experiences to validate their sense of competence and establish a positive identity. Even with these talents and accomplishments, a child must also make a contribution to their peer group and family to truly feel valued. A child whose talents and contributions are appreciated by his or her peer group and family develops a sense of connectedness (love and caring) that is essential to self-esteem. As part of any group, a youngster

The Children's Program, P.C., retains the rights for reproduction of this document. Do not copy in whole or in part in any form. Additional copies are available by request from The Children's Program, P.C.

must also have a sense of uniqueness that allows them to maintain their identity or value within the group or family. Ultimately a person needs goals and a sense of values to guide their future and make judgments about themselves.

Building self-esteem involves positive feedback. Since children with anger problems receive so much negative feedback, it is even more important that they receive positive attention and praise. Try to find specific times during the day (e.g., mealtime) to make some positive comments. If necessary, set a specific goal for giving positive feedback to your children. Try to begin criticism with some positive statement.

Praise is not the only form of positive feedback. Photograph the accomplishments of your child and put them in a scrapbook. Instead of complimenting your youngster directly, arrange a phone conversation that your child "overhears." Write a note to a family friend describing something your child accomplished or did for his class, leaving the note on the table for your child to "notice." Instead of complimenting your child, just spend time watching what they are doing since this is perhaps one of the purest forms of flattery.

Praise skills and strategies, not simply success. People feel better about their successes when they believe that they did something to achieve the success. A person does not necessarily view themselves as a good golfer after making a "lucky shot" or a talented baseball player because they received a walk that brought in the winning run. If you believe your child did something well, point out the technique they used to accomplish it (e.g., "You crowded the plate and that made the pitcher nervous").

Develop a sense of uniqueness in your child. Compliments that make reference to your child's uniqueness or individuality (e.g., "you're the only one in our family who is good with the animals" or "you're the first one in the family to learn how to play the piano.") Although family activities are very important and it is critical that parents and children have some things that they commonly do together, it is also important that children have some things that are special to them. If all the siblings play baseball, then you might consider spring soccer.

Ask children to praise themselves. When your child asks you for permission to do something or have something, ask them to "state their case." It is very important for a youngster to be able to generate their own positive feedback, to consider how others perceive their actions. Instead of saying yes to a request for a treat (because they ate a good dinner and finished their homework), give your child a chance to point out why they should be allowed a desert or special privilege. In school, give children the opportunity to point out rules they have been following or the time they have been saving or the things that they have been learning and reward the class for being able to recognize their own accomplishments.

Build Talents. It is very important that your child has something that he or she is good at. Virtually every child has an interest or skill that can be developed through practice and coaching. It does not really matter whether your youngster is good at bowling or music or art or math, but it is very important that they have one or more talents that give them a sense of competence.

Arrange Successful Experiences and Contributions. Although we do not want to be perceived as phony or dishonest, it does help to create some opportunities where your child's talent is recognized. If your youngster is interested in music, you may want to recruit their help in purchasing a CD for a friend. If they are a boy scout or girl scout, arrange a situation where you need their help tying a knot. A boy or girl who is interested in photography can be recruited to take photographs of family valuables for insurance purposes. You can arrange for children to help you find the "best buy" or purchase price of a household item. At school, the teacher can develop a daily lesson that fits a child's particular talent or interest. With a little bit of planning, it is relatively easy to arrange for your child to experience some success and to enable them to contribute.

Be part of a group. It is very important for children to be part of some group or club. Choose a church youth group or sports team or club that seems to fit your child's interests. Find some charitable organization that your family takes an interest in. If your child has more trouble in group situations, make it a parent/child activity where your presence will help guide their behavior. For some children, it is important that they develop a talent through individual instruction and practice and only later participates with the group (e.g., private bowling or swimming or music lessons).

Teach goal setting. Children have a very hard time setting appropriate goals. They tend to set goals that are too challenging or frustrating or otherwise set goals that are too easily accomplished. It is very important that children watch their parents and teachers setting goals and that they get a chance to see how adults evaluate their own behavior or performance and revise goals over time.

Teach self-evaluation skills. Although positive feedback from others is important, a person must learn to evaluate their own behavior if they are to truly develop a positive self-image. A child who is dependent upon positive feedback becomes too susceptible to negative comments. Unable to generate their own positive feedback, the absence of positive comments makes a child vulnerable. Children need to learn to evaluate their own behavior and performance. Ask your youngster to decide whether their room is cleaned adequately and get their views about their report card before you offer your opinion. Try and get them to discuss how they formed their opinion before you agree or disagree with their appraisal. In school, consider asking children to give themselves grades on reports or projects or on their report cards.