



Self-esteem: How Important is it in the Learning Environment?

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For self-esteem to grow, children must have their needs met by caring adults. As children interact with others, both adults and children, they receive feedback that affects their perception of self. To feel confident at school, children must achieve a consistent level of success. Helping younger children increase their sense of self may contribute to success in later years.

Appropriate self-esteem is crucial to all areas of learning.

Self-esteem creates natural highs. Knowing that you're loveable helps you to love more. Knowing that you're important helps you to make a difference to others. Knowing that you are capable empowers you to create more. Knowing that you're valuable and that you have a special place in the universe is a serene spiritual joy in itself.

Louise Hart - U.S. psychologist and educator

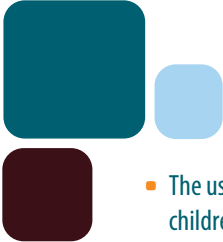
How important is self-esteem? Our North American society places high value on all areas of intellectual development. Is it possible for children to succeed academically if they do not feel good about themselves?

Does your child's educational setting provide some of the following activities to promote self-esteem?

- The teacher greets each child entering the classroom; making a positive connection before school begins.

- Classroom teams use positive language and re-frame negative experiences. Non-verbal communication such as reassuring eye contact, an empathetic smile, a nod or applause are used daily to communicate good feelings to children.
- Teachers create opportunities for children to acquire skills to increase their confidence. The teacher recognises the children's strengths and plans the day with a variety of choices so all children can experience success. Daily creative activities allow children to practice their talents in a non-threatening manner.
- Each day provides many opportunities for children to develop their social/emotional skills, such as making friends and showing kindness to others. The teacher may label the moment so the child understands what 'kind' looks like.
- Children thrive in small group situations. Sharing with others is another way to gain confidence. Children use this quiet time and the extra attention of small groups to share their thoughts, ideas and 'their' special stories.
- One of the most profound ways to give a child's self-esteem a boost is to invite a family member to visit the classroom. This is an activity that greatly enhances a child's good feelings about themselves!
- Classroom teams exercise extreme patience with young children because they know they are just practising all their newfound skills. Experiences are created for children to 'shine'. A child excitedly announces they can tie their own shoelaces; the teacher might promote them to 'shoelace expert' for the week. Teachers allow children to do all they are capable of doing in the classroom. A child may be asked to hand out stickers or ring the bell for the next activity.



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- The use of mirrors, birthday crowns, bulletin boards (displaying children's work), special helper, photos of children and their families, photos of classroom activities all help children to be part of their community.
 - The daily schedule (what are we doing today?) is child friendly and posted low for children. When children know what is happening in the day, they feel secure and confident.
 - Children are asked questions about who they are, "What is your favourite colour, food, T.V. show?" etc. Teachers help children to appreciate that we are all the same, that we are all different and that everyone is okay.
 - Caregivers give and receive affection from children. Young children are extremely interested in being affectionate. It is not spoiling to give and receive affection (adults need it to!).
 - Expectations for children must be challenging yet not out of reach of the child's abilities. Frustration is not conducive to raising self-esteem. A working knowledge of child development is helpful.
 - Teachers help children to accept their feelings. Adults label feelings for children and share their own feelings with them.
 - Children are praised often. Instead of using constant non-specific praise such as "good job, wow, etc.", you might hear teachers commenting, "Melanie, you picked up all the large blocks; you have very strong muscles!"

Nurturing competence, the food of self-esteem, comes from acknowledging and appreciating the positive contributions your children make. By catching our kids doing things right, we bring out the good that is already there.

Stephanie Martson - U.S. family therapist and author of "The Magic of Encouragement".

Books for adults:

- "Your Child's Self-Esteem" by Dorothy Corkille Briggs
- "Peoplemaking" by Virginia Satir
- Children's Books:
 - "Leo the Late Bloomer" by Robert Kraus
 - "I Like Me" by Nancy Carlson

If children feel good about themselves and the things they can do, their chances for success increase. Although not all children will be able to do all things, children with high self-esteem will be happier and more resilient when challenges present themselves.