



## RAISING YOUR CHILD'S SELF-ESTEEM

### **What is self-esteem?**

Self-esteem is how your child thinks and feels about herself. If your child usually likes herself and feels that she deserves good things in life, your child has high self-esteem. If your child dislikes herself or puts herself down, she has low self-esteem.

High self-esteem is important because when your child is confident, she usually gets along better with other people and can get more done. High self-esteem helps your child live a fuller more satisfying life. If your child has low self-esteem, she may be afraid to try doing things that could bring success. Your child may overeat, drink alcohol, or take drugs to make herself feel better. She may distrust others and have problems with friends and family.

Your child may have low self-esteem sometimes and high self-esteem at other times, like when she does well at school.

### **How can I increase my child's self-esteem?**

The way that your child sees himself depends on messages from others, especially parents.

Here are some ideas to help you raise your child's self-esteem:

- Be a role model. Children identify strongly with parents - when you accept and have confidence in yourself, your child learns this behavior. If you have high self-esteem, it helps your whole family to be more optimistic, confident, and better able to manage life's struggles.
- Set goals that are realistic for your child. If you expect too much, your child may believe that she has to be perfect to be loved.
- Respect your child's unique qualities. Your child is unlike any other and should be loved for who she is. Don't compare your child with friends, siblings, or yourself as a child. Focus on things your child can do, things your child is good at, and things that make your child feel proud of herself.
- Praise effort, not just outcome. Even if your child does not make the team, win the spelling bee, or play the lead in the school play, tell your child that you are proud of her. Your child may not be the first, best, or perfect in a particular event or activity, but praise her for trying or for improving. On the other hand, don't give empty compliments. Your child can tell when you mean what you say.
- Watch what you say. When correcting your child's behavior, focus on the behavior rather than blaming your child. For example, instead of saying "You're lazy," say, "I'm concerned about your grade in math. What do you think you can do to improve it?"
- Teach your child that she can make mistakes and still be a good person. Let her learn by trying and making mistakes. Don't always try to protect or rescue your child. Take the time to answer questions and help your child think of other options. When your child solves a problem on her own, she gains confidence in himself and feels like a success. If you solve your child's problems, you teach her to be dependent on you.
- Teach your child to think about herself in positive terms, like, "I am a kind and caring person."
- Encourage your child to help others. Feeling like she is making a difference is a great self-esteem builder.

If your child has problems with respecting or liking herself, talk to your healthcare provider or a therapist. Low self-esteem may be linked to depression or anxiety. Seeing a therapist may help your child learn to manage her moods and feelings.