

Raising Confident Kids

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In the early elementary years, children are in a stage of development where they create long term beliefs about their abilities. Research has shown that these beliefs and attitudes play a strong role in their future employment, health, and mental health.

There are many opportunities for children to either perceive themselves as inferior or confident. At school, classroom instruction is designed to allow for students to learn by doing and making mistakes. Students are encouraged to do more reflection, problem solving, and goal setting rather than being simply told what to do.

It is with calculated guidance that children develop a strong sense of themselves as capable learners. Schedules, predictable routines, clearly defined behavioral expectations, and climate lessons give structure in which kids can explore.

Children need to be encouraged with excitement for their learning process.

“You’ve got a great idea there, what will you begin with?” “Excellent, you have three out of the five steps completed, I see you staying on task.” “Go check the chart and see what else you can put there.” “I see you working hard on that last step, you are almost there.”

Children will see themselves as successful for trying, rather than creating anxiety around having to have it “right” to be acknowledged.

As early as preschool, it is essential for adults to give children the opportunity to figure things out for themselves. This doesn’t mean giving them free reign. Parents can give freedom to children to explore their abilities and power, while providing clear limits.

When parents convey an acceptance of their child’s assertion of wanting to do it their way, children feel powerful and more confident, even when they don’t actually get their way.

“You have a right to be angry that you cannot go outside now, and it is not ok to use those words in our house, take 5.”

“I see you are frustrated, and I’ll help you with your homework when your voice is as calm as mine.”

Parents who can adjust to their changing role and relationship with their child, are less likely to feel hurt, disappointed, or angry when children push away to gain enough freedom to discover their abilities.

Children develop a strong sense of trust, initiative, and competence when they receive messages like the following:

We encourage you to develop your own special talents.
You can be responsible for your choices and learn from your mistakes.
You can learn how to get along well with others.
You can discover how to manage strong emotions.
We love you even when you disagree with us.

Concrete examples of how to develop your child's sense of confidence:

1. Don't do anything for them that they can do themselves.
 - a. Teach them how to set an alarm and select a favorite song to wake up to. Let them choose, and have connection time while singing along.
 - b. Teach them how to select a breakfast choice, get out their own dishes, and put them in the sink. Demonstrate your love by being present with them during this time, while giving them space to be independent.
 - c. Guide their choices of clothing, but let them do the thinking. Will you wear your blue pants or green pants (notice it is not a choice to wear shorts today)? Give them plenty of practice in buttoning, tying and zipping so they are confident in their ability. Walk away when they are whining and "helpless", to show how strongly you believe they are capable of figuring it out.
 - d. Teach them how to climb in, buckle up, and entertain themselves in the car.
 - e. Say your well wishes in the car and let them walk themselves to class. This way, they can have more time to find their comfort zone with their peer group while waiting in the morning. If you are late, send them off to class while you go in and sign them in at the office. Rewarding them with attention at this time, can reinforce anxiety, rather than convey your belief in their ability to manage their emotions.
 - f. Have a homework station and a check off sheet to establish the routine for independence. (select snack from list of choices, folder on table, set timer for 10 minutes, questions for mom/dad, pick reading for later, change clothes, go play)
 - g. Evaluate your own emotional state. Ask yourself, "Am I doing this because they cannot, or because I need to show love in this way?" "How else can I feel valuable as a parent, without disempowering my child?" I know it feels mean or neglectful to let them be uncomfortable. Yet, you are giving them such a lifelong gift of confidence.

2. When they come to you regarding conflicts with friends, help them identify their emotions and guide their choices, without telling them what to do. Developmentally there is an automatic rejection button when it's someone else's idea. "You look really sad about that" "Are you going to ignore or ask them to stop?" "Are you going to keep playing when it's not fun for you or are you going to take a break and play on your trampoline for a while?" "How did that work?" "What else did you try?" Adults can reinforce with guidance, but resist the temptation to solve it for them. Kids don't always perceive this as supportive in the moment, but we see them light up with confidence later.

3. Beware of imposing your feelings on the situation. Kids have conflict and you have that instinct to protect. However, just because you'd like to isolate and ban anyone and anything that creates distress for your child, you are also robbing them of the opportunity to see how much you believe in them, will stay present with them to lean on, and develop problem solving skills. Your emotional pain is yours. Kids are more in the moment and more able to forgive and forget. If you would like to read more about this, check out **Raise Your Child's Social IQ** by Cathi Cohen, **Good Friends Are Hard To Find** by Fred Frankel, **Raising Self-Reliant Children in a Self-Indulgent World** by Stephen Glenn and Jane Nelson, **How to Raise a Child With a High EQ** by Lawrence Shapiro, or **Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child** by John Gottman. If you are concerned that your child is in an unhealthy relationship, feel free to contact me about boundary setting and when it's time for adult intervention.

This is an age where productivity and accomplishment gains importance. Children want to test their abilities, power, and limits. Guidance and encouragement, without smothering or overemphasizing performance is essential to their healthy development and school success.

If you have specific concerns about your child, I encourage you to talk to your child's teacher, or to make an appointment with me.

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