

5 Easy Ways to Help Your Child Build Self-Esteem with Erin Pastushok

Learn how to build your child's self-esteem with Erin Pastushok, our Director of Educational Services. Erin joined our organization in 2009 and has been part of our Education Team for 8 years. With nearly three decades of experience in early childhood education, Erin has worn various hats, including that of a teacher, inclusion specialist, principal, and now an integral part of our Education Team. She is a certified Infant, Toddler, and Family Specialist through the North Carolina Infant Toddler Program, as well as a certified Trainer through the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL).



Hi Erin! How does self-esteem play a role in the success of young learners?

Erin: Children with healthy self-esteem have the confidence to try new things, even if they might fail. They are able to cope when they make mistakes and will even try again. Confident children are able to assert themselves and have the confidence to ask for help when needed. All of these are helpful attributes when it comes to learning new skills and information. Self-esteem is closely linked to academic performance. Students with high self-esteem tend to perform better academically because they are more likely to set higher goals, work diligently, and seek help when needed. Positive self-esteem enhances social skills and relationships with peers and teachers. Students with high self-esteem are more likely to participate in classroom discussions, collaborate with classmates, and develop supportive friendships.

How can we recognize if a child has low self-esteem?

Erin: Children with low self-esteem may talk negatively about themselves, saying things like, "I can't do that," "I don't know how," or "My hair isn't nice like hers." These children might avoid social situations and have a difficult time moving past simple mistakes, becoming easily upset if they cannot do something or feel that they did something wrong. Low self-esteem can lessen a student's desire to learn, ability to focus, and willingness to take risks.

It sounds like having healthy self-esteem is influential in a child's success both academically and socially. Can you share five ways caregivers can help children build self-esteem?

Erin: Gladly! While there are many ways to help a child build confidence, I find these tactics to be successful.

- 1. Be a positive role model.** Take on challenges with a can-do attitude. Allow your child to see you make mistakes, then recover from them and try again in good spirits. Encourage your child to view their own mistakes as opportunities for learning and growth. Celebrate your successes with them and let them know that your accomplishments didn't come easy, but were worth the effort.
- 2. Encourage your child to tackle challenges and praise them for their efforts.** Let's say you would like your child to zipper their coat but your child won't try, stating that "it's too hard." Gently offer to show them how to line up the zipper a few times, then ask them to try. Even if your child can't accomplish this, be sure to praise them for their effort. Stay calm and reassure them that with practice they will succeed. Of course, celebrate their success when it happens! It is important to offer specific praise that focuses on their actions and qualities rather than generic compliments. For example, instead of saying "Good job," you might say, "I noticed how hard you worked on zipping your coat. You were so patient and determined!" If a task seems too overwhelming for your child, like cleaning their playroom, it is helpful to break the task into manageable steps. You could have them start by putting their cars away first, then their action figures.
- 3. Show love.** Of course you love your child, but life can get hectic and children can feel unimportant if their emotional needs are not being met. Make sure you are telling your child daily that you love them (or even 100x a day!) and mention things that are special about them. "I love how creative that picture you drew is!" "Did you know that you give the best hugs?" "I was so impressed when you climbed the steps all by yourself on the playground today." Be sure to make time for your child and then say things like, "Thank you for playing with me earlier. I loved it!" Additionally, celebrating their individuality will help them love themselves and boost their esteem.
- 4. Let kids help and give to others.** Self-esteem grows when kids see that what they do matters to others. Allow your child to help you cook and clean. Do they have a younger sibling? Include them in their care. Do you have a neighbor or friend that needs some cheering up? Ask your child to help you pick out flowers to take to them. Helping others and participating in acts of kindness builds self-esteem and other good feelings.
- 5. Allow kids to fail.** I know this last tip might surprise you, but I do recommend it. It's natural to want to protect your child from failure, but trial and error is how kids learn. By always doing things for our children or not letting them take risks, we are in turn teaching them that they cannot or are not good enough. Encouraging risk-taking is an impactful way to build self-esteem.

Building self-esteem is a journey that requires patience, consistency, and unconditional love. With your support and guidance, your child can grow into the confident and resilient individual they are meant to be.