



Building parent-school partnerships

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10 confidence-building strategies every parent and teacher should know

Instilling confidence takes more than heaping praise on kids. Here are 10 practical confidence-building strategies for parents and teachers of children and young people.

Children with healthy self-esteem and self-confidence learn more, achieve more and are generally happier than those with low confidence levels. Building children's and young people's confidence is complex. It's more than being a praise robot and heaping positive comments on a child at the first sign of them doing something well. Confidence building requires a number of approaches that impact on how they think, how they feel and what they can do.

Here are ten practical strategies that you can use to build real self-confidence in kids of all ages:

1 Model confident thinking

Kids soak up the language, thinking and behaviour of those closest to them in their environment. Parents and teachers play a part in modelling confident thinking and behaviour particularly when it comes to tackling new activities. In particular, let kids hear positive self-talk when you tackle something new. They should hear something like, "I'll have a go at this. If I don't do so well then I can try again tomorrow." This is far more effective than "I'm no good at this. I'll probably stuff it up."

2 Focus on effort & improvement

Current thinking shows that people who believe that they can increase their intelligence through effort and challenge actually get smarter and do better in school, work, and life over time. One way to develop a growth mindset is to focus your language on effort and improvement rather than on the results of what they do. By linking success with effort you are teaching them success comes from something other than purely their ability, talents or smarts.

3 Praise strategy

While effort is key for achievement, it's not the only thing. Kids need to try new strategies and seek input from others when they're stuck. They need this repertoire of approaches – not just sheer effort – to learn and improve. It helps too to focus language on better and smarter ways on improving. Comments such as "That was a smart idea to tackle the hardest task while you were fresh!" (strategy) and "You recognised the first few steps were the most important but then after that you were right" are descriptive statements that have significant instructional value for kids.

4 Develop self-help skills from an early age

A child's self-esteem comes as a result of his or her successes and accomplishments. The most important competencies to build confidence are basic self-help skills. These form the building blocks upon which other competencies such as organisational skills and many social skills are formed.

5 Give them real responsibility

From a young age start giving children responsibility for some aspects of their lives. By giving kids responsibility we are sending a powerful message that we think they are capable. Also they are learning the skills necessary to care for themselves.

6 Practise unconditional acceptance

Your ability to accept children and young people's best efforts in any area of endeavour, irrespective of the results, will go a long way toward determining their self-esteem and confidence.

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If a child makes their bed to the very best of their ability, resist fixing it, even though it may fall short of your adult standards. Instead remind them next time of how to do it well.

7 Expand their horizons

Some kids are confident and capable at home but are fearful and nervous when it comes to new social situations and unfamiliar environments. Children today have less opportunity than those in the past to negotiate and explore unpredictable situations. Wherever possible look for opportunities to expand children's horizons to include unfamiliar places and unfamiliar locations including catching public transport and walking to friends' places unattended when capable.

8 Recognise improvement

Focus your comments on children's effort and improvement rather than on winning the game or getting top marks. Help kids set realistic goals in line with their capabilities and interests. Learning five new spelling words a week maybe more realistic than 20 words that school may require.

9 Put the training wheels on to support learning

Putting training wheels on a bike is a great way to teach a young child to ride. They keep them upright and mobile while they

are getting the knack of balancing. We can use the same principle to support kids learning while they develop independence in many areas of life. For instance, we can accompany anxious kids to birthday parties and stay for a short time so they become comfortable before leaving.

10 Build teaching and training into your day

Teaching and training needs to be part of the every day repertoire of a parent. This means we need to add a little extra time to many of our interactions so we can help children acquire many of the basic skills of living, whether it is a young child learning to do up his or her shoelaces or a teenager learning how to fill out his or her tax form for a part-time job. When adults are busy it is often easier to do things ourselves.

Ask children for help

Doing things together is a great way to build competency and build the confidence that mastery brings. A simple way to initiate joint activity is to ask your child or young person to give you a hand with something. Better still, get them to teach you or show you how to do something you are unfamiliar with. Being a teacher rather than the learner is a great confidence-builder particularly for those kids who struggle with activities that others find easy.

Most importantly, great parents and teachers have a knack of communicating confidence in kids. They find ways to let kids know that they believe in them – that they know their kids will perform and succeed, that they have faith that they can deal with life's challenges and know that they can become more independent.



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