

Three Parenting Techniques that Foster Self-Esteem

Tip--Use parenting techniques that foster self-esteem in children.

Keep in mind--Self-esteem is a term so popularly and broadly used these days that it is now vaguely regarded as "feeling good about oneself" or "something your parents give or do not give you." According to parenting educator Jean Illsley Clarke, a better definition of self-esteem is feeling loveable and capable. They are two sides of the same coin. Self-esteem is both gleaned from those around us (being loved and valued) and earned (becoming a capable, growing person). Both components are equally important. Part of our job as parents is to foster both sides of self-esteem in our children. All parenting techniques have the potential to build up or tear down self-esteem. Praise or positively-stated suggestions are esteem-building; criticism or sarcasm erodes self-esteem. Other, less obvious techniques, such as consequences, rewards, or teaching the steps to a task, can also be highly esteem-building since they teach our children to be responsible and capable.

Tools--The following esteem-building tools are drawn from [Magic Tools for Raising Kids](#), by Elizabeth Crary.



- I-Messages. This communication technique helps parents correct their children without calling them names. For example, instead of saying, "You are so lazy!" a parent can say, "When you don't do your homework, I feel disappointed and disrespected." The child gets very specific information on what behavior is wrong instead of general criticism of his character.
- Consequences. Consequences promote learning and responsible behavior without threats. A threat intends to frighten a child into obedience and is usually critical or punishing. Consequences offer real experience and real choices.

A natural consequence happens by itself: the child who forgets his homework gets in trouble at school. A logical consequence is imposed by the parent: the child who does a poor job of cleaning the kitchen must re-do it until it is right.

Consistent experience with fair consequences help children develop into capable people.

- Attention. This is a classic esteem-builder if it is used right. Pay attention to the behavior you want to see. Comment on it. Reward it. For example, "I really appreciate it when you are kind to your little brother." Eventually the child will internalize your feedback--"I am kind to little children."

Attention can also be negative. For example, "What? Another bad grade in math? We'll be spending a lot of time this winter on fractions, young man." Again, the child will internalize your message, "I am bad at math."

Positive attention can build a good and realistic self-image.

This material has been adapted from [Magic Tools for Raising Kids](#) by Elizabeth Crary. [Order a copy](#) on our secure order form.