

# Healthy habits that build a confident child



All parents try to give their children the coping skills necessary to lead happy, successful lives. Experts say one of the best ways to prepare a child to thrive in tomorrow's world is with the gift of self-esteem.

A child with self-esteem feels confident and secure and values himself or herself as a person whose feelings, opinions and beliefs matter. Positive self-esteem supports good grades, appreciation of family and friends and a happier outlook on life.

But for the child with poor self-esteem, the world is unkind and unfair. These children become skeptical, critical and afraid. Their negative feelings and history of failure keep them from branching out. They tend to take a dim view of school, relationships and their own future. They have poor problem-solving skills and often develop eating disorders, anxiety and self-abusive behavior involving drugs and alcohol.

## How self-esteem forms

Children today are bombarded with impressions of themselves—both good and bad—from home, classmates, TV and many other sources. At a very young age, these impressions can cause kids to fashion a self-portrait in their minds of who they are and how they feel about themselves.

## Parents' call to action

Child psychologists say self-esteem is a combination of feeling competent and feeling loved. Without both, children generally do not develop high self-esteem.

The good news? Poor self-esteem in children is reversible. Some ways to build a child's self-esteem include:

- **Being positive.** Right now, you have the greatest influence on your child's self-esteem. By being confident,

caring, thoughtful and optimistic, you give your child a wonderful role model that he or she will imitate and grow by.

- **Not throwing stones.** Avoid criticizing people, places and things in front of your child. Harsh parental judgments carry tremendous weight with children and will turn them into pint-sized cynics in no time.

- **Seeing the good first.** If your child's report card has good and not-so-good grades, congratulate them first on what they did right, and then discuss the rest. Praise their hard work and encourage them to keep improving.

- **Admitting your mistakes.** If you lose your temper or are mistaken about something, apologize to your child. This prevents them from believing your wrath was appropriate, and it teaches your child how to make amends when a situation jumps the tracks.