

Section 7: How To Build Your Child's Confidence

Not everyone is seen as worthy or is accepted in the society. Instead, we reserve praise and admiration to the few who have been blessed from birth with the characteristics we wrongly value most highly – beauty, brains and riches. It is a vicious system, and we must counterbalance its impact by helping young people to develop self-esteem.

All children are created worth wise and are due the rightful personal respect and dignity. But how can we, as parents, build strong egos and indomitable spirits in our children? There are strategies by which we can instill confidence and self-worth:

Examine Your Own Values

Are you secretly disappointed because your child is ordinary? Have you rejected him, at times, because he lacks charm or is awkward? Do you think your child is stupid?

A sizeable portion of a child's self-concept emerges from the way he thinks you see him. When the child is convinced he is loved and respected by the parents, he is inclined to accept his own worth as a person.

Many children know they are loved by their parents, but don't believe they are held in high esteem by them. A child can know that you would give your life for him, yet still detect your doubts about his acceptability. You are nervous when he speaks to guests. You interrupt to explain what he was trying to say, or laugh when his remarks sound foolish. Parents need to guard what they say in the presence of the children.

Parents must also take the time to introduce children to good books, to fly kites and play football with them, listen to the skinned-knee episode and talk about the bird with the broken wing. These are the building blocks of esteem.

Teach a “Think Positive” Policy

One of the characteristics of a person who feels inferior is that he talks about his deficiencies to anyone who will listen.

While you are blabbing about your inadequacies, the listener is forming an impression of you. He will later treat you according to the evidence you have provided. If you put your feelings into words, they become solidified as fact in your own mind.

Therefore, we should teach a “think positive” policy to our children. Constant self-criticism can become a self-defeating habit.

Help Your Child Compensate

Our task as parents is to serve as a confident ally, encouraging when children are distressed, intervening when threats are overwhelming, and giving them the tools to overcome the obstacles. One of those tools is compensation. An individual counterbalances weaknesses by capitalizing on his strengths. It is our job to help our children find those strengths.

Perhaps a child can establish his niche in arts. Maybe he can build model airplanes or keep rabbits or play football. Nothing is more risky than sending a child into adolescence with no skills, no unique knowledge, and no means of compensating. He must be able to say: “I may not be the most popular boy in the school, but I am the best football player in the team.”

I recommend that parents assess a child’s strength, and then select a skill with the best chance for success. See that he gets through the first stage. If you find you have made a mistake, start again on something else. But don’t let inertia keep you from teaching him a skill.

Help Your Child Compete

A parent who opposes the stress placed on beauty, brawn and brains knows his child is forced to compete in world that worships those attributes. Should he help encourage his “average” child to excel in school?

I can give you only one opinion. I feel I must help my child compete in his world as best he can. If he is struggling in school, I will seek special coaching. We are allies in his fight for survival.

But while helping my child to compete, I also instruct him in the true values of life: love for mankind, integrity, truthfulness, and devotion to Allah.

Discipline With Respect

Does punishment, and particularly spanking, break the spirit of a child? The answer depends on the manner and intent of the parents. A spanking, in response to willful defiance, is a worthwhile tool, but belief in corporal punishment is no excuse for taking out your frustrations on little child; it offers no license to punish him in front of others or treat him with disrespect.

It is important to recognize however, that one way to damage self-esteem is to avoid discipline altogether. Parents are the symbols of justice and order, and a child wonders why they let him get away with doing harmful things if they really love him.

Avoid Overprotection

Preparation for responsible adulthood is derived from training during childhood. A child should be encouraged to progress on an orderly timetable, taking the level of responsibility appropriate for his age. An overly protective parent allows the child to fall behind his normal timetable.

Violence Against Children Growing

In 1989, the convention on the rights of the child was unanimously adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations. The convention sets universal legal standards for the protection of children against neglect, abuse and exploitation as well as guaranteeing their basic human rights, including survival,

development and full participation in social, cultural, educational and other endeavors necessary for their individual growth and well-being. The convention came into force on September 2, 1990.

Nevertheless, violence against children is escalating, over the world. Every day we hear of new kinds of violence. The statistics made available by government, international organizations and social groups are just a drop in the ocean considering that countless cases go unreported.

Child abuse is not a new social disease, because history tells us it has always existed. But its tentacles are spreading throughout the globe, and it has become more sadistic, pervasive and hideous. Modern scientific advancements have reduced infant and child mortality leading to a higher survival rate among children. But technological innovations have yet to find a panacea for child abuse and its damaging consequences. Whether physical, sexual, emotional or in the other forms of maltreatment, it has become a universal scourge.

As the WHO neo-natal and infant mortality, through better health, sanitation and immunization programs, the issue of protecting children from violence will have to take on increasing priority.

Children are like flowers. Their physical and mental makeup is very fragile. Physical abuse can lead to a permanent disability. Its mental effect can also be traumatic with most children suffering long-term emotional damage.

Mis-treatment of children takes various forms and the worst is sexual abuse for the sexual gratification of adults. One in every 10 children is sexually abused, according to the WHO. The disturbing fact is that, in most cases, the victims are abused by people they knew and trust. For such children it's a long struggle for the rest of their lives and many never recover from physical pain and trauma.

In most cases the victims are girl children and they carry their trauma into adulthood. Because of the stigma attached to this form of abuse, many victims or their families refuse to report or even talk about such things. Thus the victim carries the burden for the rest of his or her life without any psychiatric help.

As society becomes more and more permissive and degenerate, a greater number of children become targeted, as they are defenseless and can be held at ransom or otherwise suborned. Those who sexually abuse children are mentally sick and require medical attention.

On the other hand, parents should educate and equip their children to protect themselves or expose those who violate their persons. Sexually abused children also need more love, care and attention to help prevent them from having mental disorder later on.

Studies suggest that as many as one-third of the adult female population and one-fifth of the adult male

population experiences some form of sexual abuse in childhood.

The number of maltreated children continues to grow. Children, particularly abandoned and street children and those from poor sections are used as cheap labor. In some countries children are used as cheap sport from poor, third World countries used as jockeys in camel racing.

Every day, countless children suffer as casualties of war, as victims of racial discrimination, apartheid aggression; as refugees and displaced children forced to abandon the security of their homes; as disabled or as victims of neglect, cruelty and exploitation.

Society has a heavy responsibility to combat violence against children and to allow them to grow as normal, healthy and happy children.

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