

How to give your kids the gift of self esteem

A parenting guide by

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Music for the Soul

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Preface

The death of my dad made me look back over our lives together and reflect on what I truly loved and respected about him. He made such a difference—not only in my life, but to all the people he met. Then it came to me, walking my dogs one day. The most precious gift he had given me was self-belief.

Self-belief is trust in your own ability. But where does that ability come from? It comes from self-esteem, and self-esteem comes from the Latin *to estimate*. So self-esteem is how you rate yourself deep down. It is a belief and a confidence in your own ability and value. It is not the same as arrogance, which is a slightly aggressive, false sense of belief. Self-esteem is a gentle knowing that

- You like yourself.
- You think you're a good human being.
- You deserve love.
- You deserve happiness.
- You feel deep down in your inner knowing that you are an okay person.

How Do You Rate Yourself?

Some people think that self-esteem means confidence, and although confidence is part of it, it is rather more than that. There are many apparently confident people who have poor self-esteem. Actors, comedians, and singers all appear to shine on stage.

Think of Robbie Williams, Marilyn Monroe, or the Princess of Wales. Many confident people are desperately insecure, and having public adulation is no guarantee of having self-belief.

Much has been written about the issue of building confidence in children. As a teacher for twenty years, I became more and more passionate about teaching children, through Circle Time, to develop and nurture their self-belief, inner confidence, and self-worth. On average, we have 90,000 thoughts a day and 60,000 of those are repetitive! So remember to help your child think positively.

Consider that Einstein observed that for every negative message the brain receives, it takes eleven or more positive messages to negate its effect.

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CHAPTER 2

Choose Your Words Carefully

Self-belief is like a muscle—if you use it regularly, it will get stronger and grow. With regular exercise you will be able to cope with whatever life throws at you. By the same principle, if you fail to regularly exercise this muscle, it becomes limp, weak, and flabby.

When you rely wholly on yourself and build up your self-reliance, you experience a quality that only truly powerful individuals share: the belief in your own ability to make good things happen.

Self-reliance is the key that will open up a world of fearlessness, freedom, and opportunity. It is when you believe in your own strengths that you can achieve great things and a determination not to quit. Only then will you experience what separates high achievers from their critics.

The powerful person is within. It is my passion to help parents give this wonderful gift to their children, like a ripple in a pond, each generation building on the last. In every situation in life, whether it's business, relationships, or romance, neediness and displays of insecurity make people feel uncomfortable.

As the relationship expert Chuck Spezzano says: "When you're needy, you're hungry and the other person feels they're your lunch!"

Children need to be given a strong, healthy self-image, because from that solid foundation, everything else in life will become easier and more straightforward. Your current self-image is the result of the repeated messages and instructions you received as a child from your authority figures. The way you see yourself today is the result of conditioning by your parents, family, teachers, and other influential adults and peers in your life.

The way you think about yourself determines everything you do, say, act, and believe because the world around you is a reflection of your inner world. Whatever you see outside, you have a parallel inside. The inner world is the one that gives you the feeling and belief that you are okay. The outer world enables you to appear and behave in a manner that looks like you are self-assured. Both the inner and outer types of confidence support each other.

CHAPTER 3

What Is Inner Confidence?

There are four main elements to inner confidence:

1. Self-love
2. Self-knowledge
3. Clear goals
4. Positive thinking

Self-love

Confident people love themselves, and it is obvious to everyone that they care about themselves because their behaviour and lifestyle is self-nurturing. As our subconscious mind has been successfully programmed by simple, repeated instructions and messages from others around us, it is therefore very important that children learn how to enjoy being nurtured and learn how to do this for themselves.

They need to feel proud of their good features and concentrate on making the most of them and take responsibility for their own happiness. They need to feel that they are good enough just the way they are. They must learn to approve of themselves completely, including in the presence of others, and trust themselves. They must also treat themselves with complete respect.

Self-knowledge

Inwardly confident people are also very aware. They don't analyse their navels, but they do reflect on their feelings, thoughts, and behaviours. If children develop good self-knowledge, they will be more able to meet their full potential.

They will also grow up with a firm sense of their own identity and be able to be comfortable as an individual and not just as a sheep following the crowd—a very important attribute during teenage years, the time of peer pressure. Children will be more likely to have friends who are “open,” as they know what qualities they need from friendship, and will not be so defensive at the first hint of criticism

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Clear goals

A sense of purpose always surrounds confident people, because they have a clear idea of why they are taking a particular course of action, and they have realistically worked out the kinds of results they will get. If children develop this habit, they will not need to be dependent on others to make them do things. They will have more excitement and positive energy as they will be far more motivated. They will be more persistent, and they will learn to monitor their own progress in the light of their goals.

They will even find decision making relatively easy, because they will have a clear idea of what they want and how to get it. So, teaching a child how to set simple, clear, achievable goals is a really positive step towards developing a self-confident adult.

Positive thinking

Confident people are usually great company! One of the reasons is that they are in the habit of seeing the bright side of life and are expecting and looking for good, positive experiences. Children who develop this, grow up expecting life to be generally good, and they learn to think and see the best in people. They believe that most problems have a solution, and they don't waste their energy worrying about possible negative outcomes. They are flexible to change, because they like the excitement of growth and development.

What Is Outer Confidence?

There are also four main elements to outer confidence:

1. Communication
2. Assertiveness
3. Self-presentation
4. Emotional control

It's no wonder that really great schools pay attention to the attainment of these skills, as well as academic achievements, because they know that children who have these skills will have a huge head start in the adult world, and that they will also stand a much better chance of having a fulfilling personal and social life.

They need to feel proud of their good features and concentrate on making the most of them and take responsibility for their own happiness. They need to feel that they are good enough just the way they are. They must learn to approve of themselves completely, including in the presence of others, and trust themselves. They must also treat themselves with complete respect.

Communication

Children who are able to communicate effectively are less frustrated and more empathetic to other people. They are able to make small talk with people of all ages and all kinds of background, and they know how to move conversations from small talk onto a deeper level. They use nonverbal communication effectively so that it matches their verbal language, and they read other people's body language easily.

They can discuss and argue rationally and articulately, and they can speak in public without being paralysed with anxiety.

Assertiveness

If you teach your children to be assertive, they will rarely have to resort to aggression or passive tactics to get what they want out of life or relationships. They will be able to express their needs straightforwardly and stand up for their rights and the rights of others. They will be able to receive compliments freely and sensitively and give and receive constructive criticism easily.

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Self-presentation

This skill will teach children the importance of looking the part of a confident person. It will enable them to make a good first impression. It will enable them to choose the clothes that are appropriate for different roles and occasions, for example, and will make them aware of the impact of lifestyle symbols (like the house, the car, etc.). It will not restrict them by trying to please others continually.

Emotional control

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CHAPTER 5

Our Confidence

Is confidence won and lost, or is it something we are born with? We are all born with our own personality traits, but it is not so much whom we are when we are born that counts, but whom we are encouraged and allowed to become.

To respond to our children's needs, we must change ourselves. Only when we are willing to undergo the suffering of such changing can we become the kind of parents our children need us to be.

~M. Scott Peck.

As a parent you have a big responsibility to support your child and develop this crucial belief in him. Are you ready for this amazing challenge?

Raising confident children begins with your confidence because confidence is contagious. As your confidence grows, you will notice a real difference in yourself. The great benefit is that people around you will begin to see you in a different light and will react and treat you in new and positive ways, too.

But most of all your kids will respond to you differently and in more positive ways as you exude this new confident, energetic, and assertive attitude. The key thing to remember is: What you practise, you become.

By working on your confidence you become more confident, and your parenting becomes easier and more rewarding.

Parenting confidence results in more fun, freedom, and opportunities to do what really works for you. That's why I've developed my *Positive Parent Daily Workout TOOLKIT* to help support you as you discover new ways to do things. By doing the exercises on the **CD** regularly you will unlock your natural confidence and be able to explore your parenting potential.

In the following chapters you will discover some important basic and essential principles that will help you strengthen your parenting, develop your child's selfconfidence, and build the relationship that you can both enjoy.

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CHAPTER 6

Suggestion 1: Learn to Be Flexible

The only time I can think of when one size fit all is when I bought some cheap socks from the £ shop at Christmas. They really do stretch to fit everyone!

Parenting isn't like this. It's true that the basics of good parenting apply to all children, but the way these principles are put into practice must be tailored to fit yourchild's age, personality, interests, and circumstances. You shouldn't change any of thefundamentals, but you must adapt them and be flexible to fit your child's character and your family style.

The important thing to remember is that your role as a parent changes as yourchild grows. It's that simple!

The basic principles of good parenting stay the same throughout childhood and adolescence, but as your child grows and matures, her abilities, concerns, and needs change too. Good parenting is flexible, and it needs to fit into your child's stage of development. What worked well when your child was in nursery won't necessarily work when he reaches junior school, nor will it likely work when he enters adolescence.

This may seem obvious, but you'd be surprised at how many parents refuse to change their ways as their children develop and then find themselves wondering why they are having so much difficulty using techniques that always seemed to work before.

I think it is helpful to understand what developments are taking place and what they mean to you as a parent. There are four very important points to bear in mind.

First, when your child develops from one stage to the next, he is changing on the inside as well as on the outside. Your child is not just growing in shoe size but is changing in the way he thinks and feels, what he thinks about himself, what he is capable of, and how he relates to other people, including you.

Second, the psychological stages of development that children go through are reasonably redictable, which makes it easier to anticipate. The strange thing is most parents make a special effort to learn how to parent during infancy, but they don't

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expend as much energy on the pre-school, pre-teen, or adolescent stages and just hope that problems will go away. Don't make that mistake! Learn about each stage of development before your child gets there so that you can remain prepared and flexible to the changes. This is a key skill in being a good parent and building self-confident, well-balanced children.

Third, remember that children are all unique and develop at their own pace and speed, and you can't rush them through a particular phase. Sometimes they take two steps forward and three steps back!

Fourth, remember that your children are developing and changing, therefore, so are you! Enjoy the opportunities being presented to you. Don't see them as a negative experience. Grow, develop, and discover together.

The drive and independence that is making your three-year-old say "no" all the time is actually the same process that makes your thirteen-year-old daughter argumentative at the dinner table. It is also what makes her more inquisitive in the classroom.

Embrace the wider implications of your child's actions. It's all about getting "inside" the mind of someone your child's age. It's all about empathy. If you can understand your son's new found obsession with shutting his bedroom door, because he's discovered privacy, then you'll understand why he loses the plot when you walk into this room without knocking.

Remember what it felt like to be sixteen and hopelessly in love with someone who doesn't even notice you? Then you'll naturally say the right thing to your daughter when she comes home one night in a flood of tears.

Remember, parenting is not about winning and losing, it's about helping your child develop self-confidence in a healthy, balanced way. Sometimes it is about you changing, stepping back, and being mature and magnanimous. It is about you staying flexible.

Adjusting your parenting style to match your children's temperament is also useful to bear in mind when you're developing your child's confidence.

It always makes me smile to see how a parent's attitude changes once they've had a second child. First-time parents are invariably staunch believers in the nurturing side of the debate. They are confident that the experiences they've created for their child have made them what, or who, they are. The second child then comes along, and the parents look at the two children's personalities and realise that they are like chalk and cheese—even though they've been raised the same way. One is placid, the other highly strung. One is tidy, the other totally untidy. One takes easily to new situations, the other doesn't like change. One needs hardly any sleep, the other needs twelve hours! So it becomes obvious that *nature* is contributing to your child's development, as well as *nurturing*.

As a parent you must take this properly into account and accept it to build self-confidence. Adjust your parenting to fit your child. A wary child can't help being wary, or an active child can't help being active. The skill is to recognise your child's uniqueness and create situations that take advantage of your child's natural strengths and avoid accentuating his weaknesses. Otherwise, you belittle their self-esteem and make them feel a failure. Again, don't fight your child's temperament, celebrate and work with it to create a happy, relaxed, self-confident child, comfortable with his own temperament.

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Children don't develop in straight lines. As it is a gradual process, it is worth remembering that a lot of development occurs in spurts. Sometimes your child is

developing psychologically in sprints—they rest and recover, then they sprint ahead again racing, resting, and recovering again. The challenge for you, as the parent, is to recognise that your child is going through a major development transition and is not jogging along at a steady pace. It is really hard to know what to expect from one day to the next.

Most parents accept such change when their children are younger, but they forget that it is like this throughout childhood and adolescence, too. One afternoon, going to a football match, my daughter completely lost it because we didn't seem to offer her some Lucozade in the car and she claimed that we always ignore her and leave her out. Yet later on that same afternoon, on the way home, she said how much she loved us and how lucky she was to have such lovely parents. She wasn't being deliberately fickle (I remembered to mutter under my breath!) but was going through a transitional phase. The challenge is not to point out the inconsistency to her because nothing would be gained by it. We just accepted her love graciously but recognised the mixture of maturity and immature thinking.

It's like a business that has been taken over by a new company when they are implementing new structures. Sometimes the old habits die hard, and the old habits surface while everyone adapts to the new system. It's the same with children. Things get out of synch. Show patience and understanding – it will pass! Because flexibility is so important in parenting to create self-belief, it is worth remembering that if you don't change with your child, he's just going to move on without you; and let's face it, that would be a terrible thing to happen. Don't try to hold onto your youth by treating your child as if he really isn't growing up. I know it's cheaper than having a facelift, but it really doesn't serve your child in the long run!

The areas that seem most difficult for a parent to accept are the transitions in maturity. They can seem like losses, rather than just changes. There are three major changes or shifts.

The first shift is from you, being the absolute centre of their life, to you being one of many people they care about. The fact that your daughter wants to spend more time with her friends and less with you doesn't mean she doesn't love you. It just means she is developing her social circle and widening her relationships. You are going to have to share her. If you see this transition as sad, and a loss, then that's what it will feel like. If you see it as a pleasure that she is growing up and able to establish independent friendships, then it will be a source of pride to you. It's all about your perception.

The second transition is that your role as a parent moves from one of complete control, to helping your child control his own life. This can be a hard lesson for a parent to learn. Your role has to change from dominance to option based. It's like when I now take my twelve-year-old daughter shopping and she chooses her own clothes (within reason), whereas I used to choose all of her clothes when she was five.

I may not like the colour of her T-shirt, but it's more important for me to see her develop her own confidence and style for herself and to learn to make her own decisions.

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Many people describe raising a child like a bird getting ready to fly or a boat being built, ready to be launched. Whatever your analogy is, it is what your job as a parent is really all about—creating a healthy, happy, self-confident, independent adult.

*There are only two lasting bequests we can give our children. One is roots,
the other wings.*
~Hodding Carter

The issue here is not whether your role as a parent will change; it has to because your child's development demands it. Accepting change and your changing role is one of the hardest things you will ever have to do as a parent, but it is actually one of the most important. It is one of the many aspects of building self-confidence for your child.

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CHAPTER 6

Suggestion 2: What You Do and How You Act Really Matter

A useful attitude to adopt is one of "awareness parenting." This means being constantly aware of the bigger picture. It's the destination of your parenting—the nurturing of the unique, confident adult that really matters.

So many parents are simply reactive and slapdash. By being aware, you react with intention, rather than by chance. It doesn't mean you are boring and can't be spontaneous or natural, but you hold the vision of where you are trying to get to together. There are usually three situations where parents have to be aware.

The first situation is where you have plenty of time to think through what you want to do before you act. Like choosing a secondary school or deciding whether your son should take golf lessons now that he is showing a keen interest in playing. You have plenty of time to reflect on the effect that your decision will have on your child. It is an informed decision, not an impulsive one.

The second situation is where you have to react on the spot, with little time. Your three-year-old child refuses to eat what you've served her for dinner; your ten-year-old wants to do a sleepover tonight and rings you at work. Here, you have to remember your principles and respond in a consistent way. Because you have made being aware a habit, you do it quickly and in keeping with your parenting style.

The third situation is where you have a completely reflex reaction. Your toddler has thrown a wobbly by the sweets in Tesco, or your ten-year-old has just strangled her twelve-year-old brother, or your teenage daughter has gone upstairs to her bedroom with her new boyfriend to listen to some music.

If you have developed the habit of being an aware parent, handling these situations will become second nature. I always think keeping a sense of humour is enormously valuable. It defuses tension, lifts your mood, and widens everyone's perspective. We all take a great deal of time over buying a new house or car or washing machine, and yet many adults never really consider what they're doing when they are raising their children!

It doesn't come naturally to many people, and thinking about what you're doing doesn't take away all the fun and spontaneity. If you are a thoughtful parent, you are

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nurturing self-esteem, all the time. The way you nurture your children influences how their genetic nature is allowed to be expressed. It's not just in their DNA.

Remember, you have the ability to influence your child's personality, interests, character, intelligence, attitudes, and values. You can even influence your child's likes and dislikes. You can influence how your child behaves at school, at home, and with friends. You can influence whether he is kind, considerate, judgemental, or selfish.

What you do matters!

When you are an anxious parent, you convey that anxiety onto your child, because you transmit that energy. When you are a confident, relaxed, chilled parent, your child watches that and learns from you.

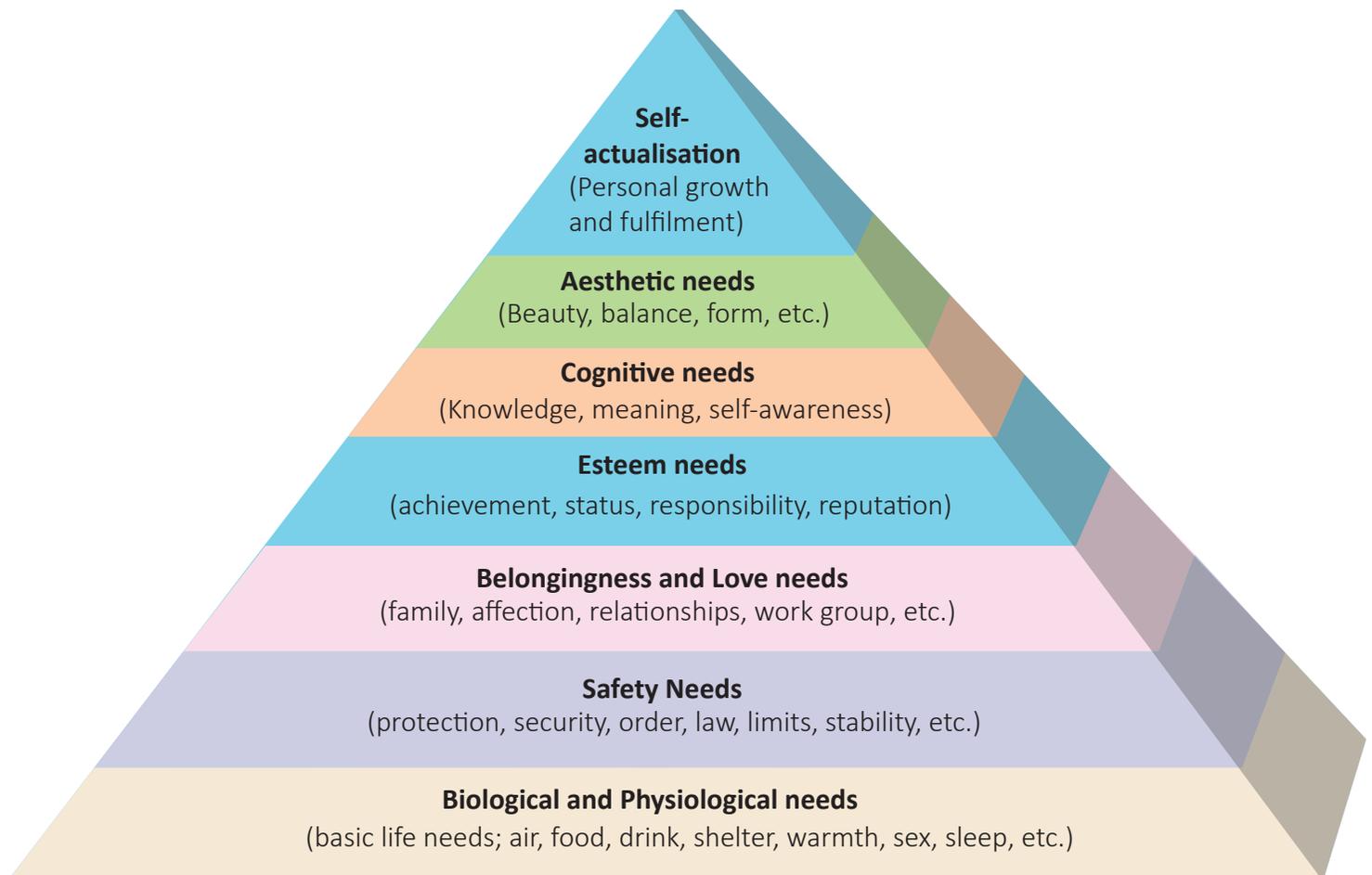
Children actually have a strong desire to grow up to be just like their Mum and Dad! If you are courteous, kind, friendly, generous, and spirited, your child will turn out similarly. If you are rude, judgemental, aggressive and aloof, your child will learn to be the same—this is particularly true before adolescence. So be careful when you scream profanities at your husband when he can't find his keys to the car again. You are a role model, whether you like it or not!

Don't be afraid to assert authority as a parent—that's what you're there for. Rather than telling yourself you are powerless against the influence of the media or your children's friends, remember that you do have a strong, guiding influence over your child. So manage it and remember it is because of these outside influences that your role is even more important. Limit your child's TV and video games and regulate what they are allowed to watch. Remember to have clear, fair, consistent boundaries. We all perform poorly when we're tired, so just be aware of that and forgive yourself, too. It's hard work raising a well-balanced, self-confident adult. Pat yourself on the back now and again. You deserve that glass of wine!

Suggestion 3: Create Security and Set Boundaries

In order to be good parents we must have realistic expectations and delicately balance our own needs, as well as our children's. It takes patience and understanding, and we all have basic needs that must be met before we can realise our dreams. Until your children can meet their own needs you must do it for them. You have to help them learn how to take care of themselves. There are six levels of basic needs, and each level supports the next—like the layers in a pyramid. If one need is not being met, it is very difficult to move up to the next one.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



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These basic concepts are based on Dr Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. These needs continue throughout your child's life, and it can take a lifetime of effort for children and parents to reach the top of the pyramid. Some never do. It takes great patience, good communication, lots of love, and maybe a sprinkling of luck. There are never any guarantees in life, and even good parents make mistakes and need to be prepared for disappointments. The more you are aware of these important needs of your child and understand the responsibilities of parenting, it is really likely that your child will reach her full potential and live the highest vision of what is possible.

Level 2 of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, is for children to feel safe and secure. We all have a need to feel protection from physical harm and freedom from fear. The thing to remember is that children of all ages need structure and limits. The actual day-to-day rules vary according to their age and level of maturity. It's fine to establish different rules for different children in your family, as long as you explain why the rules vary. If they are based on real differences between the children and genuinely warrant different treatments, then everyone understands and you won't be accused of being unfair.

Let's look at what I mean by this. One reason for a different rule could be that one child is older than the other, so it helps to explain to the younger child that she can look forward to the same rule when she is the same age as her brother. Perhaps one child has trouble completing homework and needs more supervision than his brother.

The homework rules must be the same, i.e., get the homework done on time and regularly, but one child can do it in his room or on the computer independently, while the other one needs you to sit with him. Most children actually understand this reasoning, and get upset only if their treatment is unjustified or unfair.

Children thrive on routine, security, and rules. If your child feels insecure, he'll be reluctant to try out new challenges. Children are very sensitive, and they need your unconditional love and protection.

I remember hearing this story, when I was training to be a teacher, about a sheep in a field. The first field had a very tight pen, and the sheep felt very restricted and held back with such a close boundary. He felt stifled. The second field had no boundaries at all, and the sheep was absolutely terrified. He had no protection. The third field had a safe, consistent boundary that allowed him some independence and freedom, and it was flexible as he got older. I thought it was a simple but thought-provoking analogy. So, which field are you creating for your child?

There are plenty of reasons to have rules, but the main reason is that over time they help your children develop the ability to manage their own behaviour. Strange as this may seem, your child's ability to control himself grows out of his ability to be controlled by you. Over time, your child's behaviour gradually shifts from being external (imposed by you) to being internal (imposed by himself). The rules your child learns from you shape the rules he applies to himself.

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It's only natural for a child to test your rules and go to the limit. She is striving to have some control over her own life, but your job as a parent is to do what is right for your child. You know what is best for her and you have her best interests at heart. You're also more experienced and wiser. You can see the bigger picture. Her judgement isn't as good as yours. Just remember, you are there to help her gain understanding. So remember sometimes to press your pause button.

When your child challenges you, it's easy to get caught up in the moment and say things you don't mean—things you later regret. We all do it, but it is helpful to remember that you have a pause button—something that enables you to stop between what happened, or was said, and your response to it. You choose your response!

With practice, you can develop this as a habit and a way of helping you cope under pressure. Stop, pause, take a deep breath, relax, and be firm. Stand your ground, if you know you're right. Just think about the word responsible—response(able)—able to choose your own response. This pause button can really make a difference, if you remember to use it.

If you are not firm and give in too easily because it's just easier, think about the long-term repercussions of your actions. How can you instil tenacity in your child on her journey in life if you give in so easily? If you give in because your child whines, nags, sulks, or argues back, then this is just going to make her whine, nag, sulk and argue more because she knows that if she keeps it up long enough you'll give in! Any child can figure that out! Secondly, you send a message that your rules don't matter.

If you don't like your child being angry with you, is it because you just want to be your child's friend and not his parent? It's okay for your child to be angry with you for a good decision you've made. It really is! A child who wants to stay up to watch Chelsea in the Champions League Semi-Final until 10:30 p.m. is not going to be in good humour, or any use, at school the next day. If you have a loving, balanced relationship generally, a little dispute really won't damage that.

It's important that your child sees that your authority comes from your wisdom and good judgement.

It's a good idea sometimes to just re-examine your rules to see if they still have logic and fairness and are relevant to the current age of your child. Sometimes children simply grow out of a rule. But remember, the decision to change or adapt a rule is your decision, not your child's. Being firm but fair is all there is to it.

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Words to tell your children when they're older

I loved you enough to ask where you were going, with whom, and what time you would come home.

I loved you enough to be silent and let you discover that your new best friend was a creep.

I loved you enough to stand over you for two hours while you cleaned your room—a job that would have taken me fifteen minutes.

I loved you enough to let you assume responsibility for your actions even when the penalties were so harsh they almost broke my heart.

But most of all, I loved you enough to say "no" when I knew you would hate me for it.

Those were the most difficult battles of them all.

I'm glad I won them, because in the end you won something too."

~ Author unknown

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Consistency is the way to good behaviour in your child. Many parents worry about their styles of discipline and punishment, but your most important disciplinary tool is consistency. It doesn't matter if you use a star chart system, time-out in their bedroom, banning the TV or PlayStation, or even resort to bribery as long as your rules and expectations are delivered consistently. If you are having a difficult time suddenly disciplining your child, take a step back and consider inconsistency as a possibility first. Look at your levels of stress, as this is the key area that causes inconsistent parenting. If you are going through a change, like divorce, a house move, or a new job, you may be more distracted and unpredictable. Keep to your usual routines. That tends to help the rhythm of your home and helps your child feel safe, secure, in control, and therefore still self-confident.

Maintaining a united front as parents is certainly desirable, as children up to eleven tend to see the world in black and white. During the teenage years, however, children understand that people can disagree and have differences. On important decisions and principles, make sure you have talked through privately your point of view and support each other. Parenting is not a competition between you. Just remember to always do the right thing for your child.

Suggestion 4: Express Your Love and Affection

All children want, need, and deserve is unconditional love. Children and adults thrive on affection, emotional attachment, love, and devotion. Children have a great need to love and be loved. They also need to know that they belong and will always have a place in their families no matter what.

You show your child you care by getting along with him, respecting him, hugging and smiling at him, laughing and joking, and showing your joy and pleasure of him. Your children will imitate what you do and what you are, not what you want them to be. Children learn love from parents—love for themselves and love for others.

Self-esteem begins with receiving unconditional love and support and letting your child know that she is normal, but also different and unique. Remember you can rob and erode self-esteem by ridicule, humiliation, and, of course, by hitting them.

Children from affectionate families are better equipped to cope with the frustrations and disappointments of daily life. They develop self-esteem, self-worth, self-confidence, and ultimately self-belief from being unconditionally loved. This doesn't mean you become lenient with them or lower your expectations, or just give them material possessions. Children need and thrive on their safe limits.

You can never give too much genuine affection and warmth or too much love to your child. Don't think your child will become spoiled by all the attention. Holding back, and being aloof just sends out the wrong message. Children don't need the oldschool way of toughening up. They are fragile, sensitive, small human beings who need hugs, fun, and laughter, just as much from their fathers, as from their mothers.

Children who are truly loved have a strong sense of security that they are less needy. The healthiest adults are the ones who express their love to others easily because they grew up with unequivocal and unconditional love from their parents. Those who were forced to scrape by on something less than complete affection are the needy adults.

Children need plenty of physical affection, not just when they are little, but throughout their childhood. We are tactile creatures and need physical contact with others. The rise of aromatherapy, all sorts of massages, reflexology, Indian head massage, etc. are symbolic of our need to be touched. Touching stimulates growth,

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reduces stress, and helps the immune system to work better. We need to remember that the real foundation of a parent/child relationship is emotional and physical, not intellectual.

The way, you express your love, however, may change as a child develops. I remember my own son squirming, as I gave him a big, noisy hug and kiss goodbye at the school gate in front of his friends. He was so embarrassed, possibly because I was also a teacher at his school! I had forgotten that at twelve he'd rather I hugged him at home and played it cool at school. I needed to learn sensitivity to his changing needs. Teenagers still need displays of affection too, of course, but remember to keep this part of your relationship more private during this stage of their development.

Praising children is another way to express your love for them. It not only makes them feel good about themselves, therefore building their self-esteem, but it also helps them to learn important lessons about the value of working hard to achieve a goal or to behave in a certain way. It is worth thinking about how you phrase your praise. Try to be specific rather than to link the accomplishment to your affection. Praise the NonSmoking Leaflet your son has designed genuinely, looking at the attention to detail and the content; not just saying, "I love it when you work hard at school." Then there is no judgement or pressure put on your child, just a willingness to praise the positive.

Praise your child's accomplishment with the effort and energy put into it, rather than relying on the natural talent. We rewarded our son with a trip to see Chelsea play in Barcelona, before we knew his exam results, to reward his time, energy, and commitment to studying for weeks beforehand, and going the extra mile to get into his secondary school. Our daughter felt our heartfelt praise and delight at her singing festival, because she had to overcome her shyness at performing in public, not because she received a certificate. Look at sporting stars like Frankie Lampard, Jonnie Wilkinson, or Sir Steven Redgrave. They are successful because they work harder and practice more than their peers, regardless of how naturally talented they are. They are determined to put in time, energy, and commitment. Give this determination to your child and watch him soar with enthusiasm and self-esteem.

Link your praise to the quality of the accomplishment, not just to the grade or value someone else puts on it. Children are painfully aware, by around the age of nine years old, that their accomplishments are being graded and evaluated by others. Praise the improved spelling, not the 76% mark.

Compare, if you must, your child's performance or level of accomplishment to themselves, not others! For example, say, "You can really control the netball and can really throw it accurately to another player now. Well done, that's brilliant!" rather than, "You always play better than Zoe. I don't know why she is on the team." Competition is tough enough without you adding your parental expectations and living your life through your child.

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Beware, however, of false praise. Don't pretend. Children can see through you, very easily, and don't deserve to be patronised. Focus on how they might do better next time.

Being a parent, and particularly a single parent, is emotionally, physically, mentally, and spiritually demanding as you are setting limits, sharing wisdom, cooking dinner, looking for lost football boots and old geography textbooks, offering advice, being a role model, and needing to be an adult in your own right too. It is draining, and sometimes it is just tough to figure out what exactly your child's needs are at the moment. If she is three and crying, and it's 9:00 p.m., then she is just plain tired. But if, at the age of thirteen, your child suddenly just loses it over something trivial, it can be very demanding.

The important response to be aware of is the “auto parent” or the one you hear yourself revert to when you're tired or stressed, that sounds just like your mother! The one that says, “If you don't brush your teeth, Molly, you'll end up with black teeth and no boyfriends!” Ouch! This is reacting, under stress, to how you were reared and may not be the parent you truly want to be. If you have unresolved issues from your childhood, it's a good idea to have a good look at them and be aware of them, so you can have more control over your patterns of behaviour.

SABOTAGE	WORDS OR THOUGHTS	INNER CHILD WOUND
Over compensation	<i>“I’m going to make sure my children don’t have to go through what I went through.”</i>	Often the result of hurt or disappointment
Over dependency	<i>“I’m sure I’m doing it wrong. I’ll have to ask Jill or get a new book on the subject.”</i>	Often the result of not having enough approval
Inappropriate imitation	<i>“We always did it this way when I was a child.”</i>	Often the result of love being given too conditionall
Over protectiveness	<i>“A person can’t be too careful.”</i>	Often the result of insecurity or frightening experiences, or being smothered with protection
Over ambitiousness	<i>“Only A grades are good enough.”</i>	Often the result of having under achieved as a child
Perfectionism	<i>“There’s no point in trying if I can’t do it properly.”</i>	Often the result of not being allowed to make mistakes or take risks

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Over seriousness	<i>"Life is hard—the sooner my children learn that lesson, the better."</i>	Often the result of having to grow up too quickly
Irresponsibility	<i>"Let's have another drink and let fate take care of tomorrow."</i>	Often the result of being either over or under controlled as a child
Revenge	<i>"It won't do them any harm to suffer a bit—we had it a lot tougher than them."</i>	Often the result of emotional or physical abuse
Bullying	<i>"You'll do as I say, or else."</i>	Often the result of having been hurt and deprived of reasonable rights as a child
Inflexibility	<i>"You've made your bed, and now you have to lie in it."</i>	Often the result of having to come to terms with apparently unchangeable negative situations
Uncontrolled emotions	<i>"I couldn't stop myself—you made me so angry."</i>	Often the result of having emotions repressed and not being given advice in how to handle them

I think it is helpful to understand that each stage of development seems to have a central question attached to it.

- **Infancy:** "How can I help my child feel more secure?"
- **Toddler hood:** "How can I help my child feel more in control?"
- **Early childhood:** "What can I do to help my child feel more grown up?"
- **Junior School:** "How can I help my child feel more competent and capable?"
- **Early teen:** "How can I help my teenager feel more independent?"
- **Late teen:** "How can I help my adolescent understand himself or herself better?"

Creating a safe haven or a real home is very important to children, as it is a place of safety. A place to relax, be messy, play, chat to family, create, discover, unwind, have privacy, to be alone and be themselves completely. It is predictable in its familiarity. It is not only a place of love, security, and protection, but also a place to respect.

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Conveying our love to our children is priority number one. It needs to come before any other aspect of the parenting process. Kids don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care. Before you offer correction, guidance, or suggestions, your unconditional love, needs to be the basis of your relationship with your children.

~ Stephanie Marston.

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CHAPTER 10

Suggestion 5: Get Involved

So, what is all this fuss about *quality time*? What is it, and do you do it? Here is a little quiz to see if you are really actively involved in your child's life.

- Can you name all of your child's teachers?
- Can you name your child's best friends?
- Do you know your child's favourite activity at school?
- Do you know what book he's reading (or even if he is reading!)?
- Can you name your child's heroes, in sport, films, music, or on TV?
- If you have a teenager, do you know why she likes her music?
- Do you always know where your child is, and with whom?
- Do you know if your child is happy, sad, popular, lonely, anxious, untroubled?

If you don't know the answers to these questions, perhaps you need to get more involved in your child's life.

Children with involved parents do better at school, feel better about themselves, have greater self-esteem, and are less likely to take drugs or go off the rails. It doesn't matter how old your child is, a toddler or a teenager, as they need your involvement—and that means spending time with them.

The reason why it's so important to spend time with your children is that you never know when they're going to open up to you. My son never opened up in the car on the way home from school when he was tired and hungry, when I directly asked him, "How was your day?" It was always at unspecific times, when we were just chilling or being casual in our activity together. So the more time you're together increases the likelihood of finding out about that row at school today, or that unkind remark or that funny incident in the science lab.

By going to football matches, rounders matches, swimming galas, netball tournaments, or piano recitals, you're showing your commitment, interest, and

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reassurance to your child—and by driving a crowd of friends to bowling, you hear all the conversations naturally.

Parenting is not something you do when you feel like it. It takes hard work and often means you have to rearrange meetings, if you're a working parent; but when your child has flown, the nest you won't say, "I wish I had spent more time in the office!" You'll regret you didn't spend more time with your child when you had the chance.

To me, quality time doesn't mean teaching my daughter equations. I don't want to be her tutor. I'm her parent. I help her with homework, and then we like to bake cakes and paint rainbows and buy earrings. Quality time isn't about what you are doing; it's about how you do it. It is state of mind, not a list of learning outcomes. It's about fully engaging, really listening, sharing a passion or interest, being relaxed, and having fun. If you'd rather be somewhere else, mentally, then go! You're not spending quality time with your child. Don't be on planet autopilot. Your child knows when you're genuinely interested, so be there mentally and physically. It's better to spend an hour fully engaged than two hours pretending. That's not what quality time is all about.

Try to become interested in what interests your child—not what you are interested in, or think your child *should* be interested in. Swap your thinking around. Be led by your children. It helps their self-esteem and maturity, and you will learn lots of new things!

Suggestion 6: Develop Independence

From the day you play peekaboo with your baby, you are preparing her for separation from you. It is a process. From the first day at school, first sleepover, first school trip to France, to the day she leaves home, it is a stepby-step gradual moving out into the big world, confident and independent from you.

Good parenting requires a balance between involvement and independence, and your child learns her self-confidence from learning to manage self-sufficiency.

Ask yourself these three questions to help develop your child's independence:

1. Does my child have the capabilities to handle this situation, or make this decision on his own?
2. If my child handles this on her own successfully, will she come away feeling better about herself, or will she have learned something really important as a result?
3. If my child makes a mistake, will the consequences be something we can all live _with in the long run?

Parents who encourage independence in their children help them to develop a sense of self-direction. To be successful in life, children need both self-control and self-direction. They also need self-discipline to balance their own individual needs with the needs of others. It is perfectly normal for children to push for autonomy and push the boundaries. It's not always about rebelliousness and disobedience. It is about yourchild's need to feel in control of his own life and not feel constantly controlled by someone else. Children need to feel a mixture of freedom and constraints.

Here are some suggestions you can try.

- **Pick the right battles** and remember to be flexible as your child moves from one stage of development to the other.
- Give your child a **limited choice** between two things. This builds your child's confidence, but really, you have already pre-approved your child's choices.

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- **Praise your child's decision**, as this is very important in building confidence in her own decision-making choices.
- Help your child **think his decisions through** and don't always give him the answer.

Let your child make his own mistakes. We often step in too soon to avoid disappointment, and a child often gains much from the experience if we let her. By helping your child to feel supported but not smothered, you're helping to develop her self-confidence.

Take the issue of homework, for example, an issue close to my heart as a former teacher! There's a big difference between being an involved parent and being a parent who does too much. When your child is young, parenting is about helping him learn the discipline of homework and making sure he allocates enough time for it, understands what is being asked, and that it is done well. In the early years of homework, it is about developing good habits, a regular time, a clean table, the right equipment, and support if he needs help. But as your child gets older, he must learn to manage these tasks himself. He must learn what is expected of him and what is mediocre work or top-notch work. Then the focus is on the habit of homework and where he does it. It is about allowing him to accept responsibility for his own work. In secondary school, your involvement is limited to when you are explicitly asked to help, if you can. Again, the key is about being flexible and changing as your child develops and matures.

It is only natural for your child to seek independence from you, and you need to stay flexible in granting her autonomy. If you can exercise it in a way that allows you to maintain ultimate control, then you have both won.

The arguments that may arise while your child is striving toward independence is a pain, but actually, if you stand back and look at the bigger picture—the destination of your parenting—it is a desirable trait in your child. Too much passivity isn't a good thing to encourage in a child, as it robs him of control, and ultimately his self-esteem and confidence in handling the world. Your child is showing you that he is an individual and that he is growing up when he challenges your way of doing things.

To develop self-esteem, children need psychological space. If you are too emotionally wrapped up in your child's life, she will feel smothered and overprotected. She will not flourish. Children need to feel attached emotionally to their parents but also separate from them. Children have a right to their own emotions and feelings. They need to sort out for themselves how they feel about things. Remember, children need some emotional privacy, and they don't always feel like talking. Just be ready and available when they do.

It's all about achieving a balance!

CHAPTER 12

Suggestion 7: Treat Your Child with Respect

Your relationship with your child is the foundation of her relationship with others. If you treat your child with compassion, kindness, and respect, she will grow up to be concerned about others, caring, considerate, and respectful towards others. If you are uncaring, rude, and dismissive, then it is very likely she will turn out the same as she grows up.

The key to your family culture is how you treat the child who tests you the most.

~ Stephen R. Covey

Respect is the key energy of a good family, as it brings everyone together. It creates a strong family unit that can handle whatever challenges are thrown at it like divorce, bereavement, redundancy, or any of life's ups and downs. When a parent shows respect and unconditional love to the most difficult child in the family (at that time), it creates trust and the whole family learns this culture as well. Families don't die from their setbacks, but they can wither and die from a negative, sarcastic, taunting, or guilt-ridden culture within a family.

Many parents worry too much about whether their child respects them, and they don't think enough about whether they treat their child with respect. Children naturally look up to their parents and want to be like them. If you are being a respectful role model, your child will respect you and learn to respect others. It might be helpful to remember that even when your child is contrary, rebellious, or argumentative he is probably not behaving this way out of spite and disrespect, but going through a particular stage of development, like adolescence. He is trying to assert his individuality and express control over his own life.

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Remember, respect is not measured in whether people agree with you—it is measured in how they behave towards you when you disagree. Of course, some children may have behavioural problems, which need professional support, but generally speaking, if you treat your child with respect she will respond with respect towards you.

When your child speaks or acts in a way that is disrespectful, the first question you should ask yourself is, “Why do I think my child did this?” not, “How can I make my child respect me?” So, do you treat your child with respect?

Respect is not the same as being your child’s friend or equal. Remember, you’re the parent and he’s the child. Sometimes you need to assert your authority in ways that can’t be done if you’re being his “mate.” It’s confusing for a child, too, if he feels his parent depends on him emotionally, particularly during a divorce or times of stress.

Your child needs to act his age and have a carefree childhood as much as possible. It sounds obvious, but speak politely to your child and respect her opinion, pay real attention when she is speaking to you. Treat her kindly, and don't interrupt when she is speaking. It distresses me to hear parents telling their children to "shut up" or say things that humiliate or embarrass them in front of other people. They berate them, interrupt them, don't pay real attention to them, and speak to others in front of them as if they don't exist. I suppose they’re demonstrating that they have the upper hand and are more powerful. Unfortunately, these actions do nothing to enhance a child's self-esteem or create family respect or unity.

Showing respect can be in the way you communicate with your child. There is a huge difference between talking at, and talking with your child—rather like laughing at or laughing with someone. Parents need to guard against the conversation that always feels like a lecture, an inquisition or a nag.

Do you talk at your child, or with your child?

It's so easy to fall into a one-way dialogue, where you are monitoring, instructing, or trying to pass on life's lessons, but that can be very demoralising and boring for a child. Children, just like us, want to be heard. They want their point of view valued, not corrected. It shows that you are genuinely interested in what they have to say and that you want to spend time talking with them and understanding them.

Here are some ideas on two-way communication:

Pay attention. Concentrate on what your child is saying by putting the paper down, stop gardening, making the tea, or whatever. Actively listen with your eyes, as well as your ears. Let your child feel she is important and interesting.

Actively ask your child's viewpoint. Ask your child what he thinks or would have done in the same situation.

Ask open-ended questions to get more than a yes or no answer, such as, “What did you enjoy most about the film?” Any what questions are good, open-ended questions.

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Don't interrupt. Let your child have time to formulate her sentences and finish what she wants to say. Children think slower than adults, and when you cut your child off, you are sending the message that you don't really care about what she has to say.

Be sincere and genuine. Don't just ask banal questions for the sake of it—be really interested.

It shows respect Another way to show respect is to be careful in your choice of expressions.

“Don't answer me back!”

“If I want your opinion, I'll ask for it!”

“You'll understand when you're older!”

These statements are rude and patronising. There are other more polite ways of telling your child that you're making a final decision on what he thinks isn't right for this situation. You also might be in a hurry, or stressed, so the best thing to say is that you're going to use your authority and will explain to him later about your decision. And, of course, remember to keep your word and do just that. If you have built a culture of respect, your child will understand.

The key skill you're trying to develop is to be able to disagree and discuss their disagreements respectfully. At times, you as the adult may have to make the final decision. Part of respecting a child is also allowing her to act her age and enjoy being at her stage of development. It's about living life in the present.

Children grow up so fast anyway. They all develop at different rates, so it is worth remembering childhood is not a race to see who gets to adulthood first!

Conclusion

I hope these suggestions for building your child's self-esteem seem practical, relevant, and thought provoking. We all love our children and want the very best for them. But sometimes we need a bit of help in sorting out the wood from the trees at a particular time in our lives or our children's stage of development. I think it helps to remember that we are all a work in progress and are doing our best. We all want to bring up happy, well-balanced, confident children, and it is just our bad luck that they didn't come with a handbook! Even if they did, would we really bother to read it, or would we just get on with having fun and discovering for ourselves anyway?

*Fifty years from now, it will not matter what kind of car you drove,
what kind of house you lived in, how much you had in your bank
account, or, what your clothes looked like.
But the world may be a little better, because you were important in
the life of the child.*

~ Forest E. Witcraft

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Conclusion

Enjoy your children. They are the windows to your soul and the adults of tomorrow!

Sue Atkins
The Parenting Expert



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If you enjoyed this book, try some of the other publications in the Positive Parents series.

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- *If Men Are from Mars and Women Are from Venus, What Planet Is My Teenager On?*
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