



Confidence and Children

Improving your child's beliefs in their own ability to do things

- View children and young people as capable and let them know it. Children are likely to become the sort of people they believe others believe them to be.
- Be careful not to say things like "you're really not musical" or "you can't do maths" or "you can't spell" or "you're not sporty at all." You really don't know how a child will develop, but saying these things can dramatically affect a child's self-belief and therefore may affect their motivation to try. It could have a much longer-lasting influence on a child than you might expect. For example, many adults won't attempt sports because of a teacher's or parent's fleeting comment about their not being sporty when they were young.
- Remember that what you say, either positive or negative, can have a long-lasting effect on the children you work with and live with. Children will listen and believe you.
- Set tasks that are challenging for a young person's skills level. Help them find tasks that are just difficult enough to inspire and satisfy them but not so difficult that they become anxious.
- To make tasks more manageable, help children break them up into lots of little steps. Give feedback on each step, and praise them for their effort and persistence.
- When children need help, you should try to give it. But try not to provide the solution. Instead, give the child support to find the solution themselves. So you could point them to a website that might help them or ask them a question to help them think about their problem in a different way. Coming up with the solution on their own will help improve their confidence.
- Encourage children to improve on their own standards, not to compare themselves to others. Do this by pointing out the improvements a child has made on previous work. Don't point out how much better or worse their work is than someone else's.
- Praise a child for doing something well. This is an important way of showing encouragement and support.
- Be honest with your praise. Telling a child they have done well when they haven't will not improve their confidence. They simply won't believe you and they may be confused by your dishonesty.
- Tell children how proud you are that they are working so hard at dancing, writing, swimming, etc, and that you really enjoy seeing them perform, reading their stories or watching them swim. You

could also tell them how glad you are that they enjoy what they are doing so much. This will help them persevere in developing skills that truly give them pleasure.

- Show a child that you believe in their ability to achieve something, rather than make statements which may suggest to them they have already achieved it. This means that you should avoid telling a child they are 'really clever' or that they are a 'brilliant' footballer or writer or painter, etc. This may make them think that they don't need to try because they are going to do well anyway. Or it may make them feel under pressure to prove themselves to you.
- Take time to show genuine interest in what they are doing. Show you are interested in them and their work. Ask them questions about what they are doing. Giving attention to a child on a one-to-one basis can be a powerful way of improving a child's confidence. Perhaps you can remember a personal comment from a teacher or a parent that left a lasting impression on your life?
- Be positive about failure! Help children to see the value of mistakes and failure, and that they are steps to success. Mistakes and failure are completely normal, and are important opportunities for learning - they can be used to help us find other ways to achieve our goals. Show this yourself by admitting your own errors in a good-natured way, for example, "Oh, yes you're right, I was a bit careless there - I won't do that again!"
- Make sure any criticism is constructive. Describe the behaviour, not the person. So, instead of telling a child that they are 'lazy', say that they're not putting in enough effort and that they need to work a bit harder. Be specific about the changes you want them to make if they have made a mistake.
- Be very careful about using the words 'always' and 'never', for example "You're *always* late" or "You *never* get your work in on time." Are these statements really true? If not, you are just encouraging pessimistic thinking.
- When a child has difficulty with a subject at school, such as spelling, parents should be careful about well-meaning statements such as "oh don't feel bad, it runs in the family, I couldn't spell to save my life." The child may give up because she thinks there's no chance they can improve. She may even think it's admirable to be poor at spelling. Instead, a parent could say "It would be great if you could improve at spelling so that you can help me to spell better."
- Help a child who doubts their obvious abilities, for example maths or dancing, by continually reminding them of their successes in that area. Abilities aren't much use if you don't believe you have them. Inaccurate self-beliefs can mean that young people don't achieve as much as they could, personally, socially and academically.
- Believe in a child's potential. Self-beliefs that go slightly beyond what a child can actually achieve are the most likely to help them try hard and persevere. So avoid judging how much a child is capable of achieving in a particular field. People surprise us all the time - we can never be completely aware of anyone's full potential.

Improving your child's sense of self-worth

- If you are a parent, give unconditional love to your child to develop their sense of self-worth. This means loving them for who they *are*, not what they do, how they behave, what they achieve or what they look like. It is important that you *show* unconditional love - it's not enough just to feel it. A child needs to *see* that you will always love them, accept them and look after them. They need to see that you will always do this, even, for example, when they don't behave well or when they fail a test. It is also important that you show them that you enjoy spending time with them.

- Try to help children develop a sense of self-worth by encouraging them to be more mindful of what they can do for others as opposed to what other people think of them. Teach them that they may feel better if they turn the spotlight off from themselves and turn their inner light out to the world around them.

Improving your child's sense of responsibility for their actions

- Support older children to plan and organise their schoolwork effectively, but give them the responsibility of getting it done. Make sure they have a quiet space with no distractions where they can work. Try to avoid telling them what to do and when to do it as this will not help improve their sense of responsibility.
- Encourage children to think before they act and to pause before reacting. The best way to teach them how to do this is to do it yourself. So when something happens that makes you angry or upset, pause and take a few breaths before you respond. Make a conscious choice about how you want to respond in this situation. For example, you don't have to let a bad day at work spoil your evening. You can choose not to let it affect you.
- Use proactive language yourself to help children learn to be proactive. This will show them how to take responsibility for their lives. Say things like: "I choose", "I prefer", "I can do better than that" instead of things like: "I can't", "I must" or "that's just the way I am."
- Teach children to take the initiative to make things happen instead of waiting for them to happen.
- Teach children to be proactive by helping them to think about solutions and options instead of problems and barriers.
- Encourage children to take responsibility for themselves as early as possible. For example, provide toddlers and very young children with equipment they can handle by themselves, like low coat hooks, plastic drink tumblers, etc. Children develop feelings of competence when they can care for their own needs.

Expect older children to help out at school or in the home. They can help with preparing meals or cleaning and tidying up. This will help them to feel they are contributing as well as developing skills for use as they get older. Show your appreciation by telling them how much they have helped you or saved you some time.

