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The Impact of Self-Esteem

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Children with disabilities often struggle with self-worth due to academic, physical, and social frustrations. Parents and teachers need to be aware of how critical it is to encourage healthy self-esteem in children with disabilities. Here are several ways to encourage positive feelings of self-worth in a child:



You're Special – Help your child feel special and appreciated. Research indicates that the presence of at least one caring adult helps a child become resilient. Adults should not ignore a child's problems, but focus energy on a child's strengths. Set aside specific time each week to focus on things your child enjoys doing.



Learning to Cope – High self-esteem is often linked to problem-solving skills. Help your child think about his/her problems and brainstorm possible solutions. It is also helpful to role play problem situations with your child so you can demonstrate the thought process and behaviors that help resolve problem situations.



Watch What You Say – Try to encourage your child by phrasing what you say in positive terms. For example, instead of saying, "You need to try harder," try saying, "We need to find a better way to help you learn." Children are less defensive when parents and teachers use problem-solving to help them change poor academic habits.



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Show You Care – At times, it is frustrating to work with a child who is having a learning difficulty. Show the child you care by being empathetic to what he/she is going through.



Give Options – To avoid power struggles with a child, give him/her options for completing tasks. For example, provide different options for places at home or school where the child can do his/her work. Providing these initial choices helps the child feel as if he/she is a part of his/her academic success or that he/she has some control.



Don't Make Comparisons – Especially within family units, it is important that parents don't compare siblings to each other. Also, in a school setting, teachers should be conscientious about comparing students in the same class to each other.



Emphasize the Positive – Many children with learning difficulties see themselves as individuals that cannot do anything right. Parents

and teachers must take every opportunity to make a big deal about any strength the child exhibits. For example, if the child does well on an art project, make positive comments and display the art to reinforce that you are proud of his/her accomplishment.



Opportunities to Help – Most children have an inborn desire to help others. Parents and teachers that cater to this inborn desire help a child realize that he/she has something to offer the world. A great idea is to involve a child in charitable work.

Helping children understand themselves and develop healthy self-esteem is critically important. Children with academic, physical, and social struggles need to feel accepted. They also want to feel like they are contributing to their home and school in a positive way.

Parents and teachers should make a child aware that he/she is not alone in his/her struggles—that many children have difficulty with school, and parents and teachers are there to provide help and support.

Resources

Self esteem & stress management. Retrieved February 12, 2008, from

<http://www.idonline.org/indepth/selfesteem>

Tips for developing healthy self-esteem in your child. Retrieved February 12, 2008, from

<http://life.familyeducation.com/self-esteem/parenting/36374.html>

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