

PEDAGOGICAL INPUT

for the adventure of family life



49_How do I boost my child's self-esteem?

First, it's important to know what self-esteem actually is. It is composed of two components: On the one hand, what I know about myself - my sense of self - and on the other hand how I feel about what I know about myself, what value I give myself. For example, the child knows it does not dare to climb the tree. And then it's a matter of how it feels about this. Does the child think it's bad that it doesn't dare? Is it ashamed? Does it feel like a failure? Or can the child just accept it and stand by its decision?

A healthy self-esteem can be recognised by the fact that one looks at oneself in a sober, differentiated and accepting way. It makes a big difference if I feel like a failure and am ashamed because I can't sing well or if I say, "Well, I'm not going to be an opera singer, but that's okay."

A healthy self-esteem is a person's *psychological immune* system. A healthy self-esteem makes it easier to get through crises and difficult times.

Take the child seriously and express your happiness with it.

There are two main things you can do to boost children's self-esteem. On the one hand, by noticing what is going on with children and taking it seriously. If they are sad, then we say: "Ah, I see you're sad. Tell me what makes you so sad." If they are frustrated or angry, the same applies: "You are very angry. I'm interested in what is making you so angry."

It is about noticing what is going on with the child, having an interest in it and taking it seriously. Through our curious, interested attitude, the child learns what is going on inside and that it is alright to have that feeling. This even applies to small children. If it spits out the porridge three times while eating, you can ask politely: "Aha, you're full?!" This is how the child gets words for its state of mind: if I feel this way, it means that I am full. These appreciative words for his experience strengthen his self-esteem, i.e. his knowledge about himself. At the same time, it learns it's okay to be full. Therefore, it continues to feel valuable to the mother as it is right now. The second thing that builds the child's - and everyone's - self-esteem is when we express our joy at its existence. When we are happy about the child without the child having to do or achieve anything for it. Children can feel this quite well when we are silly, laughing, frolicking around with them and are happy when they see the sparkle in our eyes. We must express our joy in the child. Feeling it within ourselves is not enough. We have to let others feel it too.

Appreciation for what it IS, not what it DOES

Children do not build self-esteem through praise or criticism, such as: "You're good", "You're doing great", or "That was stupid." Praise and criticism are evaluations of performance. If we want to help children build self-esteem, they need our recognition for who they are - without judgement. When the child happily stands on the slide and shouts: "Mama look!", then it is enough to perceive the child's joy and smile back. "Yes, I see you. Looks like you're having a lot of fun."

Enemies of self-esteem are: Shame, criticism and finger pointing.

"What are you pouting about again? Stop it!" "Don't act like an idiot and listen when I tell you something!" This criticism only makes the child feel stupid, bad and guilty for what is going on with him right now. And these feelings are burned into it. It will then feel ashamed of itself. Why?

Children treat themselves as we treat them.

Children think about themselves in the same way we behave towards them. It's worth examining how often we criticize and shame children. Let's take children seriously, like an adult, dear friend. We can safely say no to the children's current wishes, but without embarrassing them for having those wishes.

Text: Astrid Egger | www.familie.it