

parenting*ideas

Bringing out the Best in Kids Series
by **Michael Grose**

BRING OUT YOUR CHILD'S CONFIDENCE



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WHAT IS SELF-CONFIDENCE AND HOW DO KIDS ACQUIRE IT?

Self-confidence and self-esteem are linked. Self-esteem often refers to how we feel about ourselves and self-confidence is often linked to how we act. It usually describes behaviour. For instance, you hear people say how a person showed a lot of confidence when they gave a talk, or how they showed a lot of self-confidence in a social setting. Self-confidence is also used to describe an attitude or state of mind. For instance, you often hear sports coaches talk about how their team's confidence levels affect their performance. It gets confusing!

For this program I am focusing on the notion of developing self-confidence in your children. It is linked to self-esteem, or how a child feels about him or herself. I don't want to get into semantics or splitting hairs. I am happy to accept that self-esteem and self-confidence are interchangeable terms. The main thing is to get kids developing confident mindsets and acting in confident ways.



THE IMPACT OF CONFIDENCE

Children's self-confidence influences their social behaviour and learning. Children with low levels of self-confidence are less likely to step out of their comfort zones to extend themselves and try new experiences. They tend to take fewer risks than those with healthy levels of self-esteem. Confident kids persist at learning tasks because they know eventually they will succeed. They experience some anxiety in new social situations but they either use strategies to overcome their fears, or they quite simply take a risk knowing that they may not be successful.

Misbehaving children are generally discouraged children. Lacking confidence to belong through positive ways they find their place within their family and peer group through misbehaviour.

Quite simply, if children have a healthy level of esteem and self-confidence and feel good about themselves they are more likely to make friends and succeed at preschool and at school.

HOW DO KIDS ACQUIRE SELF-CONFIDENCE?

Levels of self-confidence are influenced by nature and nurture. That is, genetics plays its part. Some kids by their nature are greater risk-takers and can separate themselves from poor performance. They don't put themselves down if they fail or don't act anxiously in new situations. Neither do they talk themselves out of being successful or having a go. They have self-doubt, but it is not debilitating. Some kids, by their very nature, have lots of spirit.

The birth order of children also impacts on kids' confidence levels. First born boys are frequently low risk-takers and can be very self-conscious when young. Eldest girls frequently have high levels of confidence, particularly in social settings. Youngest children frequently lack confidence when they are very young, yet can become high-risk taking, high-achieving young people as their older siblings leave the nest.

For more information about kids birth order read my book *Why First Borns Rule the World and Last Borns Want to Change It*. You can get it at www.parentingideas.com.au



THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT PLAYS A BIG PART IN KIDS' CONFIDENCE LEVELS

The environment a child grows up in influences self-confidence levels. To promote self-confidence you need to provide an environment that is:

1 RICH IN LOVE, TIME FOR THEM AND SUPPORT FOR THEIR GOALS

Kids need to feel loved. They need adults who make time for them and adults who will help them achieve their goals.

2 STABLE AND CONFLICT-FREE

A stable family environment provides the necessary background for kids to develop, grow and take risks.

3 EXPERIENCE & OPPORTUNITY-RICH ENVIRONMENT INVOLVING SOCIAL INTERACTIONS AND SELF-HELP SKILLS

Kids need to be exposed to a variety of social experiences with adults and peers so they have plenty of chances to mix and develop their social skills. Similarly, they need plenty of opportunities to do things for themselves at home, at school and in their neighbourhoods.

4 PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE – MISTAKES ARE NOT THROWN IN THEIR FACE

Kids need to grow up in an encouraging environment that allows them to make mistakes without fear of being constantly reminded or creating a fear of failing. When kids fear failure, they act in safe ways to avoid failure.

5 EXPECTATIONS ARE POSITIVE AND REASONABLE

Expectations are tricky. Too high and many kids can give up. Too low and many kids will reach them. You need to expect kids to succeed, not necessarily straight away, but they will succeed. Expectations need to be positive and in line with their age and stage of development and their abilities.

KIDS NEED TO

✓ EXPERIENCE SUCCESS AND CHALLENGE

When children interact successfully with their world they build up a bank of accomplishment and see themselves as being capable, built on solid experience.

✓ RECEIVE FEEDBACK TO HELP THEM IMPROVE

They don't behave or act in a vacuum. They need solid feedback, so they know what they do well, and also they know the behaviours they need to change so they don't keep making the same mistakes.

KIDS' CONFIDENCE LEVELS CHANGE

Confidence isn't fixed.

It waxes and wanes particularly through different stages of development.

TODDLERS

Toddlers see themselves through their parents' eyes. They often reflect the confidence levels of their primary parent. Parents at this stage need to make kids feel special and loved. Tell kids that you love them and avoid giving negative messages and attaching negative labels to them. This gets tricky as behaviourally, they can be challenging for parents. You need to manage their behaviour without dampening their spirit or harming their self-esteem.

THREE AND FOUR YEAR OLDS

Kids at this age can separate themselves physically and emotionally from their parents. They begin to form a picture of themselves and their capabilities separate from their primary parent. They learn about themselves in fairly physical ways, and will begin to compare themselves with others. Parents need to mirror back to children that they are capable and offer a safe, secure, stable environment so they can explore and develop their various abilities.

PRIMARY SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN

Children in primary school are trying to work out what they can do and how they can fit into their various groups. In many ways, these are prime confidence-building years. Some children's self-esteem falls when they start school as they meet strange new situations with lots of other new children and new rules to learn. Self-esteem in the primary school years is often linked to learning, how they perform at sport, how they get on with others and, in the later years, how they look. Parents need to reflect back to kids that they are capable, make the most of teachable moments and help them explore many options so they can work out their strengths.

ADOLESCENCE

Confidence levels can vary greatly through this stage of development fluctuating wildly at different times. Often confidence is linked to hormonal changes, how a teenager looks, and how they think they look, impacts on their self-confidence. Many teens begin to specialize in those areas of life where they experience success, and cease activities where they can't achieve. How they are liked in the eyes of their peers is a high driver for many teenagers.

It helps if teens have some practical goals to aspire to and have loving, accepting families to support them. Positive peer groups also impact on their self-esteem as teenagers.

THE HEAD, HEART AND HANDS APPROACH

CONFIDENCE-BUILDING NEEDS A PARENT TO USE A NUMBER OF APPROACHES

This program will help you tackle esteem and confidence-building through three prime modalities – the head, the heart and the hands. First, it will show you how a confident child thinks and teach you how to foster positive habits of the mind and a real sense of optimism. Second, the program will introduce you to the wonderful skill of encouragement, which you can use to develop a sense of courage in your child. This is the heart of confidence-building. Third, as self-confidence and self-esteem are influenced by a child's capabilities the program will help you develop a sense of competency in your children. Through this program confidence, courage and competency will become intricately linked with each other.



GETTING INSIDE THEIR HEADS

DEVELOPING CONFIDENT MINDSETS

"Things are neither good nor bad but thinking makes them so" Shakespeare

It's not events but children's thinking about events that determine how they feel. Certainly past experiences influence children's beliefs but their feelings of confidence are affected by their thinking.

A mindset or habit of the mind is the automatic tendency of a child or young person to think when confronted by events. By thinking in a certain way a child will experience certain emotions which will affect his or her behaviour.

Confidence means knowing that you will more than likely be successful at many of the activities that you will tackle. You will not necessarily succeed the first time but with effort and patience you will succeed eventually. The work of Dr. Michael Bernard, the author of the popular 'You Can Do It' Program that is used in schools throughout Australia, US and UK tells us a great deal about the habits of the mind or mindsets that are needed for confidence. His research found that confident children have high levels of self-acceptance. Confident children take realistic credit for their achievements and don't allow mistakes or failures to deter them from future efforts. Children with low confidence or negative self-esteem constantly put themselves down or negate efforts by others to praise them. Confident children are able to take risks when it comes to learning or tackling new tasks, while children with low confidence tend to be perfectionists and needed to be seen to be perfect. Confident children don't measure their self-esteem according to the level of approval of significant others, while children who are low in confidence constantly seek the approval and praise of significant adults.



The table below demonstrates the different automatic mindsets of confident kids and low self-esteem kids in Bernard's study.

| CONFIDENCE POSITIVE MINDSET | LOW SELF-ESTEEM NEGATIVE MINDSET |
|--|---|
| <p>SELF-ACCEPTANCE "I'm okay when I make mistake."</p> <p>TAKING RISKS "It's more important to have a go, than it is to succeed."</p> <p>BEING INDEPENDENT "It's what I think about myself that is important, rather than what others think."</p> | <p>SELF-DOWNING "I'm pretty bad at that. I usually stuff up."</p> <p>PERFECTIONISM "I'll only be happy when it's just right."</p> <p>NEEDING APPROVAL "I'll only do what others approve of."</p> |

It is better to see this notion of automatic mindsets as a continuum, rather than a fixed notion. In other words, kids' automatic thinking habits will sit somewhere along the acceptance, risk-taking and independence continuums, rather than at either end. Ideally, we want the automatic default mechanism for their thinking to be more down the left-hand end of the continuum than the right end.



HOW DO KIDS DEVELOP CONFIDENT MINDSETS?

Sometimes parents get drawn into sibling disputes when they don't involve them. Parents become embroiled in the conflict and help create the problem rather than solve it. Children usually become quite adept at drawing their parents into disputes between siblings.

Parents need to be aware of the following ten common ways children involve parents in their sibling disputes:

1 EXPERIENCES OF SUCCESS

Help kids experience some levels of success in all areas of endeavour, as well as those areas where they lack confidence. Past experiences of success or failure are important and that's why the early years for children are really vital for this notion of developing a sense of confidence or a sense of "I can." When kids experience success, they know that next time they try or the next time they attempt something, they're more likely to have success. Those children who haven't experienced success early in life don't have the faith that they can actually be successful.

Those early experiences of success in any area, whether it's in an academic sense or in a learning sense, or if it's even just trying things at home, become self-fulfilling prophecies.

It is also from kids experiencing success when they have struggled. If you've experienced success in an area where you have really had to struggle at, you have really had to strive for and suddenly you realise, "Wow, I can play the game!" or, "I can play that musical instrument," or, "I coped with that difficulty," then you are more likely to think you can do that later on, it goes 'into your CV' (so to speak) – and that's why small struggles and early successes mean so much for kids.

2 EXPOSURE TO CONFIDENCE AND CONFIDENT THINKING

Exposure to confident mindsets is vital. Kids actually need to hear what a positive mindset sounds like. They need to hear self-acceptance. They need to see and hear their parents taking risks and they also need to see and hear their parents being independent. So, modelling is vital. It helps if kids are exposed to a "Can do" attitude from their parents, rather than a 'maybe, if everything goes to plan, it could be okay' attitude. Confidence is catching so the best way to ensure kids are confident is to work on your own confidence levels as a parent.

(My Bringing out your children's Self-Confidence at-home learning program has more information on the types of thinking that kids learn from their parents.)

3 CATCH THEM BEING CONFIDENT

Catch them in the act of taking risks, of self acceptance, of being independent. For example, for a child who takes a risk a parent might say, "That was great to see you get up in front of the school and give a talk! That was new and maybe a little scary but it will be easier next time." For a child in whom you are trying to promote that sense of independence it might be "Wow, you must be really proud of yourself for doing extra work on that project!"

4 ENCOURAGE THEM TO POSITIVELY REFRAME (LOOK ON THE BRIGHT SIDE)

One great way to develop positive mindsets is to encourage them to find the bright side in any situation. Basically, this involves setting their antennae to look for some good, something positive or some learning in any situation. Believe it or not, it becomes a habit after a period of time.

ENCOURAGE KIDS TO LOOK FOR THE 'GOOD' IN

THEMSELVES Notice the things you do well, good things you do, contributions you make, qualities and characteristics you possess (e.g. "I am pretty good at sticking at things and working out problems, even if it takes a while.")

OTHERS Look for and comment on a wide range of behaviours in others including friendly behaviour, risk taking, hard work, perseverance, generosity, appearance, ability, patience and so on (e.g. "She may make a lot of noise but her mates just love her for it.")

BAD EXPERIENCES This is the hardest of them all. It is not saying you want bad things to happen. It's basically about wishing they didn't happen but making the best of things.

POSITIVE ASPECTS CAN BE

- ✓ **LEARNING SOMETHING TO PREVENT IT HAPPENING NEXT TIME**
"I may have been unsuccessful this time but I know what to do next time."
- ✓ **POSITIVE SPIN-OFF**
"It was a boring party but I did meet a new friend, which is great."
- ✓ **LEARNING ABOUT YOURSELF**
"Maybe football is more my bag. I don't think I am cut out for cricket."
- ✓ **IT'S JUST THIS! AVOIDANCE OF SOMETHING MORE UNPLEASANT**
"I wrecked my skateboard but at least I didn't get hurt and end up in hospital."



5 UNDERSTANDING SELF-TALK

Confident kids use different self-talk than kids who lack confidence. Confident kids talk themselves up, and give themselves messages in line with their abilities. Low confidence kids use a great deal of negative self-talk and talk themselves out of doing things. Negative self-talk becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. When asked to give a talk at school low confidence kids can think: "I'm no good at giving talks. I'll only mess it up. Kids will laugh at me." This becomes their default mechanism. Alternatively, the self-talk of a confident child maybe, "Giving talks is hard. But I'll do okay at it." Or "Wow! I'm great at talks. I can't wait!" Kids' self-talk will determine their attitude and also how they approach the activity.

Get kids to listen to their self-talk and help them work out alternative messages that they can use if they are self-defeating. They can repeat positive or more helpful messages before they approach a situation that causes them anxiety. Encourage kids to write out positive self-talk messages that help them think more confidently about risk-taking situations so that the messages are reinforced.



PARENTING DEVELOPMENT EXERCISE

THINK OF THE LAST TIME YOU CAUGHT YOUR CHILD 'BEING CONFIDENT'

What was the situation?

What did you do or say to your child?

How did your child react? What was the effect on your child?

How can you apply ideas covered in Section 2 to your current parenting?

GIVING KIDS HEART

DEVELOPING THE COURAGE TO BE IMPERFECT

"Like a plant needs water children need encouragement." Rudolf Dreikurs

Encouragement is the key to promoting a sense of self-esteem and a strong sense of self. A confident child is one who takes on different challenges, who opens themselves up to many different experiences in life and that sort of confidence requires a measure of courage – because it takes courage sometimes to break out and try new experiences, to take on different challenges, because you actually may fail. You may fall on your face and things might not work out for you.

Courage comes from a French term which means 'to give heart', so the notion of encouragement is about giving kids heart. I think it's every child's right to receive encouragement, and every child needs someone in their life who says, "You can do this."

ENCOURAGEMENT

Encouragement is the process of focusing on individual resources and giving positive recognition to build that person's confidence and self-worth. Parents can encourage their child by recognizing any ability he or she has and fully accepting that ability. Encouragement is not a way to get kids to do what you want, but to help them reach their full potential and fulfill their goals.

Encouragement is different than praise. Praise is like fast food, there's not a lot of nourishment in it. Encouragement is like a good healthy diet, it's very nourishing. We, as parents, need to be aware of the difference between praise and encouragement and be heavy on encouragement and light on the use of praise, which focuses more on results.

The notion of encouragement is about giving kids heart, but if we look at the difference between the two, praise is more results-focused. "You did really well in that test. You won that game of sport. You kicked five goals. Top job!," whereas encouragement is not so worried about the result but more focused on the effort, the improvement, the contribution, the enjoyment, more focused on the process.

WAYS TO ENCOURAGE KIDS

Encouragement is a skill that can be learned. For it to be effective it needs to be applied consistently. Encouragement and positive expectations go hand-in-hand. Encouraging parents expect kids to succeed, not necessarily straight-away, and not necessarily with ease. Encouraging parents recognise that kids will be anxious at times but they have faith in their ability to cope. They also value kids as they are, not for who they are going to be.

HERE ARE FOUR WAYS TO ENCOURAGE KIDS

1 PRACTISE EMPATHY & SHOW FAITH IN THEM

Parents need to recognise kids' genuine anxieties and fears but also demonstrate faith in their ability to cope. When parents give kids real responsibilities ranging from handing in a note at school to being home on time as a teenager they are indicating they have faith in their ability to handle responsibility, self-regulate and be independent. If parents discover their faith is not warranted then they need to renegotiate the guidelines with their kids.

2 RECOGNISING EFFORT & IMPROVEMENT

It's easy to recognise jobs well done or completed tasks such as winning a contest, earning a badge at school or making a bed really well. What do you do with kids who struggle in those areas important to them and you? Focus your comments on effort and improvement. Help them set realistic goals in line with their capabilities and interests. Learning five new spelling words a week maybe more realistic than 20 words that his school may require.

3 FOCUSING ON STRENGTHS & ASSETS

Fault-finding can become an obsession for parents, particularly when they have teenagers. Sometimes kids can have strong traits, which at first seem like liabilities. Kids who are determined to have their own way may seem rebellious and stubborn. They can be labelled difficult kids. But these qualities and behaviours have a positive side. Dogged determination to succeed is a valuable asset in any field of endeavour and is usually applauded. Rather than criticize, step back and recognise the value of these characteristics. Similarly, focus on the interests and abilities that children possess in all areas rather than what they can't do. If music is their forte rather than academic success don't spend all your time pointing out the liability. Celebrate the strength instead. Often when we focus on kids strengths, assets and abilities in certain areas they improve in other areas as well. Confidence has a snowball effect impacting on all areas of life.

4 ACCEPTANCE OF MISTAKES & ERRORS

We live in a society that celebrates success and achievement. Perfect marks, immediate results and getting things right seem to be highly valued. We forget at times that mistakes are part of the learning process, just ask any golfer. We tolerate errors in adults, but often we don't in children. View errors as valuable learning experiences, rather than something to be avoided. Low risk-takers and perfectionists will often do anything to avoid making mistakes. Your ability to accept their well-meaning efforts in any area of endeavour, irrespective of the results, will go a long way toward determining their attitude to mistakes.

15 PRACTICAL WAYS TO ENCOURAGE KIDS

HERE IS A LIST OF SOME OF THE METHODS I HAVE OBSERVED PARENTS USE TO ENCOURAGE KIDS WHO LACK SELF-CONFIDENCE

1 GIVE REAL RESPONSIBILITY

Giving real jobs and real responsibility sends a message of 'I believe that you can do this.'

2 DEVELOP SELF-HELP SKILLS FROM AN EARLY AGE

'Never regularly do for kids the things they can do for themselves' is a powerful concept if you want to develop a sense of competency in kids.

3 DESCRIBE THEIR STRENGTHS

"Gee Jess, you are so good with people. That smile of yours just puts people at ease." Telling kids what they do well develops greater self-understanding and becomes part of their self-reference system.

4 ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING

Start by asking for their opinions and suggestions about a range of things.

5 ACCEPT MISTAKES AS PART OF THE LEARNING PROCESS

That means, don't freak out or over-react when kids don't get the perfect score. Take a matter-of-fact view of error-making.



6 EMPHASISE THE PROCESS, NOT JUST THE PRODUCT

Focus comments on effort, improvement, contribution, enjoyment and confidence rather than put kids on a pedestal because of good results.

7 SEE ASSETS IN LIABILITIES

Poorly organised kids can be very creative, stubbornness can be seen as knowing what you want, and being a poor decision-maker can be seen as flexibility. It all depends on your viewpoint!

8 HAVE POSITIVE EXPECTATIONS

A well-meaning but negative comment such as, "Don't drop that cup" indicates your expectations!

9 TEACH KIDS TO POSITIVELY REFRAME

Teach kids to see the advantage in any problem.

10 PRACTISE RANDOM ACTS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

We all love to be appreciated by those around us so shower your kids with appreciation and encouragement when they least expect it. Watch them stand a little taller when you do.

11 ESTABLISH AN ACHIEVEMENT BOARD OR CORNER IN YOUR HOUSE OR ROOM

Place their schoolwork, artwork and sporting stuff on an achievement board at home. This shows you value what they do.

12 STICK EXAMPLES OF CONFIDENT MINDSETS AROUND THE HOUSE

Visual representations such as, "Look on the Bright side" and "You'll never know unless you have a go" around the house for kids to absorb.

13 TELL CHILDREN HOW YOU HANDLED DIFFICULT SITUATIONS IN YOUR LIFE

Hearing that their parents are human and struggled as kids is very reaffirming for kids who are anxious, shy or struggle at school.

14 USE THE "CONFIDENCE SANDWICH" WHEN GIVING KIDS FEEDBACK

Kids need feedback if they are to improve any skill. Some kids react badly seeing it as criticism. If this is the case, then sandwich your feedback between comments about strengths, assets or positive performance.

15 COMPARE THEM ONLY TO THEMSELVES

Introducing competitive kids to the concept of personal bests is a great way to get them to focus on improvement, and give them something to strive for. "That's the most game time you have had this year. That's great"



REMOVE DISCOURAGING PARENTING PRACTICES

Inadvertently, we can discourage children by using fault-finding approaches to correct skill errors, not accepting genuine efforts, comparing children to peers or siblings and spoiling or overprotecting. Here are some common discouraging parenting practices kids can experience.

1 OVER AMBITION IN PARENTS

Over ambitious parents communicate to kids that they should do more. Faced with a report card of 3 A's and 2 B's the over ambitious parents focus on the B's rather than celebrating the A's. The intentions of these parents maybe good but the result is often less productive, and encourages avoidance of activities and interests which may not produce outstanding results.

2 FAULT-FINDING APPROACHES

Often parents can be critical of children's efforts for all the right reasons. By pointing out what a child is not doing right they can then improve is the logic here. But this notion is incorrect as many children and young people give in when their mistakes are always focused on. Avoid being over-critical of your child. It is easy to become your child's best critic rather than his best coach. Focus on his positive efforts rather than his negative efforts or poor behaviours.

3 CONDITIONAL ACCEPTANCE

Sometimes we accept children's efforts only if they reach our lofty adult standards. Accept their genuine efforts as good enough for their age and stage of development. For instance, if your seven-year-old child makes his bed but he forgets to tuck the corners in, avoid the temptation of fixing it up. Be thankful that he is doing it and as he gets older and more skilled he can fix his bed more akin to adult standards.

4 PEER AND SIBLING COMPARISON

Parents often compare one sibling with another, as we wish to offer one as a model to emulate. "Why don't you keep a neat bedroom like your sister?" or "Look how well your brother behaves. You should be more like him." Such comments not only inflame sibling rivalry but also deeply discourage children. Similarly, we can compare children to their friends with comments like, "Jai is doing really well at school. He is more self-motivated than you. He does his homework straight away." I am not sure if such comments are ideal ways of motivating kids!!

5 SPOILING, OVERPROTECTING

When we spoil or overprotect children we rob them of opportunities to develop their personal resources and their coping. When we spoil children we send the message that they are incapable. It is our actions rather than our words that discourage children. They teach children that adults are there to serve them and cater to their whims.

THE LANGUAGE OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Encouragement has its own language. Sometimes it's hard to know what to say to a child when they do well or when they struggle. Following are ten encouraging phrases that you can use with your kids, partner, workmates, friends, or even on yourself

A NOTE OF CAUTION

Whether the suggested remarks are encouraging depends on the attitudes of the adults who use them. Do you show confidence, belief, acceptance and trust in a child (mixed with humour) or do you moralise, preach or show impatience?

1 "YOU DO A GOOD JOB OF ..."

Encourage children when they least expect it. Even a comment about something seemingly small and insignificant can make a child feel good about himself. I swear I see my own kids grow a few centimetres when they get some unsolicited encouragement.

2 "YOU HAVE IMPROVED IN ..."

Children will generally continue to try if they can see improvement in any activity they put their minds to. Sometimes they just don't know they are getting better so they need someone to tell them.

3 "I LIKE YOU, BUT I DON'T LIKE YOUR BEHAVIOUR."

Love the sinner, hate the sin is the principle here. When dealing with children whose behaviour can test you it is best to separate the deed from the dude, the act and the actor.

4 "YOU CAN HELP ME BY ..."

To feel useful and helpful is important to everyone. Kids want to be helpful – they really do – we just need to give them the chance.

5 "HOW WILL YOU KNOW YOU CAN'T UNLESS YOU TRY?"

Perfectionists and low risk-takers often put up all sorts of barriers to trying something new. They often fear failure or worry that mistakes reflect on them.



6 "SO YOU MADE A MISTAKE, WHAT CAN YOU LEARN FROM IT?"

Mistakes are part of learning, ask any golfer!

7 "YOU WOULD LIKE ME TO THINK YOU CAN'T DO IT, BUT I THINK YOU CAN."

Sometimes it's hard to know whether to push a child or let them avoid a situation or activity. But I prefer to err on the side of challenging kids rather than letting them avoid an activity. They usually surprise themselves and exceed their own expectations.

8 "I'M SURE YOU CAN DO IT. DON'T GIVE UP."

Lack of success in any activity is frustrating so an adult who shows faith in them can be just the tonic they need to keep persevering. This is important as resilient learners know that they may not achieve something straight away – many kids today give up if they can't succeed immediately.

9 "I'M SURE YOU CAN STRAIGHTEN THIS PROBLEM OUT, BUT IF YOU NEED ME YOU KNOW WHERE TO FIND ME."

It is amazing when you show faith in a child's ability to resolve a social, physical or academic problem that they often meet your expectations. Sometimes they need to be given the emotional space to find solutions to their own problems.

10 "YOU SHOULD BE PLEASED/PROUD OF YOURSELF."

Self-praise is about the best praise a child can get. Sometimes kids need some prompting that they should be pleased/proud/happy or whatever about themselves and their activities.

Most people when they read lists such as the one above do a mental self-check to see how they measure up, or even to check if they agree. If you read a phrase that you liked, think is useful or maybe that you should do more of, then focus on using that phrase for at least a week. You will be amazed how soon it will become part of your normal vocabulary.

DEVELOPING THE ENCOURAGEMENT HABIT

It takes time and effort to become an effective encourager. You won't necessarily wake up one morning to discover you have become the world's most encouraging parent. Because encouragement is a learned skill, it improves with practice. Practise on yourself first. That is, become a self-encourager not just for your own benefit but for the benefit of your children.



PARENTING DEVELOPMENT EXERCISE

1 THINK OF AN ENCOURAGING PERSON YOU KNOW. HOW DID THEY MAKE YOU FEEL?

What did they specifically do to encourage you?

How can you apply these skills to your own parenting?

2 LOOK AT THE '15 PRACTICAL WAYS TO ENCOURAGE KIDS' ON PAGE 16 CIRCLE THOSE YOU HAVE USED AND LIST BELOW THOSE YOU INTEND TO USE WITH YOUR KIDS.

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TAKE A HANDS-ON APPROACH

DEVELOPING A SENSE OF COMPETENCY

"Never regularly do for a child the things they can do for themselves." Maurice Balson

A child's self-esteem and self-confidence come as a result of his or her successes and accomplishments. It doesn't happen in isolation. It doesn't happen in a vacuum and it just doesn't happen magically after hearing a bunch of feel-good messages. When children interact successfully with the world they build up a bank of accomplishments. For example, when a child learns to wash himself from an early age, when he starts to dress himself, when he or she starts to set the table, when he or she starts to do a lot of self-help activities, they actually start to build a picture of themselves of, "I'm capable, I can do things."

Competency and confidence starts at home. It starts by developing self-help skills and giving kids opportunities to contribute positively to their family. This not only develops positive skills but helps them belong to their family through positive contribution.

The best way to develop independence is by giving kids realistic responsibilities at home. Whether these are self-help skills or making contributions to the family when kids actively participate in their family and take responsibility for their own well-being not only do they develop important basic skills, but they learn that they are valued for what they do, as well as who they are.



HELPING KIDS ACQUIRE SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES IN SITUATIONS WHERE THEY MAY NOT BE SUCCESSFUL

Developing skills and preparing kids for situations where success is not assured can take time and effort, but the results in terms of heightened confidence levels when kids have tackled a difficult scenario are really important. There are three broad parenting strategies you can use to help kids prepare for challenging situations, and develop the skills needed to help them succeed.

1 TEACHING AND TRAINING

Parents who have kids that lack confidence in many areas including social settings and in school can assist their children develop the skills they need to succeed. I am not suggesting that you replace a teacher at school and give formal lessons at home. I am referring to the myriad of informal opportunities you have at home to help your child. One way to do this is to look for teachable moments. They happen all the time when we interact with our kids.

A MAKING THE MOST OF TEACHABLE MOMENTS

A teachable moment is usually disguised as a problem and is easily missed when we focus on the now.

When faced with a TEACHABLE moment ask yourself:

- ✓ **HOW CAN I TEACH MY CHILD TO COPE AND NEGOTIATE THIS DIFFICULT SITUATION?**
e.g. Encouraging kids to talk about problems is a great coping skill.
- ✓ **WHAT CAN MY CHILD LEARN ABOUT HIMSELF FOR NEXT TIME?**
e.g. A child may learn when he goes on a school camp that he was dreading that he can spend time away from home and still survive.
- ✓ **WHAT CAN MY CHILD LEARN TO AVOID OR TURN THIS SITUATION AROUND?**
e.g. A child may learn that he can reduce conflict with less than pleasant peers by ignoring nasty comments and actively spending more time with friendly kids.

B PRACTICE IN PRIVATE

Behaviour rehearsal is a little used, but very useful training strategy. Basically, you set up a situation at home that stimulates kids to learn the skills and behaviours they need in a broader context. Some examples of behaviour rehearsal are: using family mealtime for kids to practise skills required to eat in a restaurant; role-playing going to a friends' house; and getting kids to practise some greetings to use when they meet an adult.

C HELP KIDS FAKE CONFIDENCE

In my work with student leaders I would come across some students who were quiet achievers, but lacked confidence in social situations. This was a problem for many as they were required to represent the school in a variety of public functions. I taught these kids the notion of faking confidence. We role played various scenarios and I insisted they stand up straight and look as if they were confident. I was amazed how this seemingly minor strategy impacted on their confidence levels. Recently, in my studies of personal development I have learned how this strategy makes sense. When we pretend to be confident we actually fool our minds into thinking we are confident. So the notion of fake it until you make it has credence!!

2 SCAFFOLD THEIR WAY TO SUCCESS

Parents need to make it easy for kids to do well. One way of helping children feel successful is by chunking complex activities down to bite-size chunks. They can learn to empty the dishwasher by doing the knives and forks first. Very young children can make their beds by smoothing the doona and arranging their teddies before learning more complex tasks. Older children can learn to cook a meal by helping you prepare part of a special dinner.

Applying this principle to risk-taking activities a child may spend short periods of time in an anxiety-inducing social setting rather than attend the whole function. A child who just shudders at the thought of giving a talk in front of his peers may first hold a prop for a friend who is giving a talk. When he does this successfully then he can build up to giving a message on behalf of a teacher to another class and so on. Small steps to success is one way to help kids who are paralysed by anxiety or lack of confidence.

3 TALK ABOUT WHAT THEY DID

When children have tackled a difficult situation it helps if parents can revisit what they have done and talk about this with kids. Talk about what kids did well, and not so well. Help kids work out how they will be successful next time. Help kids identify the factors that worked for them and demonstrate your confidence in their ability to do well next time they meet a similar situation.



PARENTING DEVELOPMENT EXERCISE

1 WHAT ARE THREE THINGS YOU DO FOR YOUR CHILD NOW THAT HE OR SHE CAN DO FOR THEMSELVES?

2 WHAT WILL YOU NEED TO DO FOR YOUR CHILD TO LEARN THESE SKILLS AND ABILITIES NEEDED?

3 THINK OF A TIME IN THE PAST YOU HAVE HELPED YOUR CHILD RISE TO THE CHALLENGE PRESENTED BY A DIFFICULT LEARNING OR SOCIAL SITUATION? WHAT DID YOU DO? WHAT CAN YOU LEARN FROM THIS FOR NEXT TIME?

DEALING WITH PERFECTIONISTS, SHY OR SENSITIVE KIDS

SENSITIVE KIDS

Sensitive kids worry about what others think of them. They often sense danger well before others and they see the consequences of behaviours well before their peers.

Is this sensitivity nature or nurture? I suspect the former is the culprit. It has been estimated that 15 per cent of children are born with a more sensitive temperament. That is, a temperament that makes them particularly aware of their surroundings and of any changes that may occur.

Sensitive kids are like mood detectives with their antennae up trying to detect subtle changes in the moods of those around them. In some ways this is healthy as emotionally intelligent people are tuned into the behaviours and feelings of others. Sensitive kids generally have high emotional intelligence quotients.

However typically sensitive kids often read too much into what others say or do.

Sometimes parents will say something without thinking or a friend will ignore them for a whole day for no other reason than they were self-centred. Sensitive kids take these matters to heart. They take the mistakes of others and turn them into something they are not. They see a simple blunder as a personal slight or something sinister. Sensitive kids can think too much and read too much into simple situations. That's why sensitive kids can become anxious, shy or both. They can be hard to live with.

If you have a sensitive child you need to see and appreciate both their sides. The side we most often see is the shy, inhibited, fearful worrier. The flipside is that sensitive kids generally have kind hearts; are empathetic, intuitive and usually possess a creative streak. These are wonderful attributes to have.

As the world kids inhabit at school is akin to a jungle, sensitive souls can leave themselves open to being hurt by their peers. Kids who wear their hearts on their sleeves can sometimes be given a harder time by unthinking peers just as those who look and act a little different than the norm are susceptible.

Recent research into the area of children's sensitivity revealed that around 40% of sensitive kids experience some form of real anxiety.

The secret to the 60% of kids who DON'T experience anxiety are certain 'protective' factors. The top of this list is parenting style. Sensitive kids benefit from having an optimistic, resilient parent who supports them but doesn't allow them to take themselves too seriously. It also helps if parents can encourage their child to take risks socially and applaud their social successes, no matter how minor.

The double whammy for kids of sensitivity and negative or pessimistic parents is not ideal. Kids need a parent who gets across the message that there are some unpleasant events but they can cope with them. They also need a parent that reinforces that the world really is a great place and not full of uncertainty and danger.

It is good if parents are supportive; even better if a parent is resilient so that the sensitive child sees how to cope with some of life's hurts, rejections and disappointments. In fact, sensitive kids are less likely to develop anxiety if at least one parent is of the 'thick-skinned', positive, even jovial type.

When sensitive kids are raised in a balanced way with proper understanding and encouragement, they are well-placed to grow up to be happy, healthy, unusually well-adjusted and creative adults.

HOW CAN YOU HELP YOUR SENSITIVE CHILD?

Apply some of the strategies outlined in this program to assist your sensitive child develop the self-confidence he or she needs.



PERFECTIONISTS

Many first borns are afflicted by the curse of perfectionism. The burden of being in the parental spotlight means that many first borns will only star or achieve in areas where they are certain of success. So they tend to narrow their options by sticking to the safest path. They tend to be less innovative and adventurous than later born children. Perfectionists can also be hard to live with. They make demanding partners and anxious children. They can be critical of those around them just as they are highly critical of themselves. Their attention to detail can be infuriating and their inflexibility can be enraging. Much worse, being a slave to perfectionism means kids become observers rather than participants in many aspects of life.

9 WAYS TO SPOT A PERFECTIONIST

You can pick a perfectionist 1,000 metres away because they share common attributes. Here are nine attributes that perfectionists share:

1 PERFECTIONISTS PLAN EVERYTHING

They won't go on a family picnic unless the route is known beforehand, the estimated time of arrival is decided upon and the weather is checked days out. Perfectionists like to be in control so they don't leave things to chance.

2 PERFECTIONISTS ARE NEUROTIC ABOUT ORDER

Tidy desks, shoes neatly arranged in wardrobes and neatly stacked food shelves are de rigueur for perfectionists.

3 PERFECTIONISTS ARE CRITICAL OF THEMSELVES AND OTHERS.

If a perfectionist paints a room he will focus on the inevitable thin spot rather than celebrate a job very well done. Subsequently they don't enjoy success.

4 PERFECTIONISTS HATE TO LEAVE JOBS HALF DONE

They will stay at work until a task is completed.

5 PERFECTIONISTS PROCRASTINATE

Many perfectionists put off starting projects because they doubt if they can do them perfectly. Procrastination is not just a great stalling tactic, it is a protective strategy. They wait until conditions are perfect to start a job. The trouble is the time is never perfect so they never start.

6 PERFECTIONISTS DON'T LIKE TO DELEGATE

No one but no one can do a job as well as they can so they tend to take on far too much and they don't trust anyone to do a task as well as they can.

7 PERFECTIONISTS APOLOGISE A LOT

They will always find an excuse such as there is not enough time or money to do the job that they would like. Perfectionists always believe that they can do better or try harder.

8 PERFECTIONISTS DON'T EXPECT SUCCESS

They are generally pessimistic and look for reasons not to do things rather than reasons to try things. Their expectations become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

9 PERFECTIONISTS ARE GOVERNED BY ABSOLUTES

They see the world as black and white and have strong opinions about what people should and should not do.

The best way to help perfectionists loosen up, lighten up and take risks is to develop what the great Austrian psychologist Rudolph Dreikurs dubbed 'the courage to be imperfect'.

Dreikurs maintained that we have to accept our faults and don't put pressure on ourselves to be superhuman or be better than others.

When we focus all our efforts on making a contribution rather than being better or superior then we are not held back by doing the perfect job.

Kids develop the courage to take risks and fail when they are less focused on themselves and more concerned about others.

Perfectionists need to lower the bar they set for themselves and be realistic about what they can achieve. When they focus on others and develop more realistic expectations not only do they end up achieving more but they experience more fulfillment and contentment.

HOW CAN YOU HELP YOUR PERFECTIONIST CHILD?

Apply some of the strategies outlined in this program to assist your perfectionist child take more risks as a learner and reduce the pressure they place on themselves



SHY KIDS

The following information about shy kids has been obtained from Parent and Child Health South Australia. It is a wonderful overview of shyness for parents. For more information visit <http://www.cyh.com>

Many young children are shy. They gradually get more confidence with other people as they grow older. Shyness is when children are worried in social situations and do not easily join in.

Most children are shy in some situations, for example situations that are very new to them. If it continues when they go to school and into adolescence and prevents them from taking part in class and enjoying their play times, it can be very painful for them.

But shy children do not always grow up to be shy - there is a lot that can be done to help them overcome their shyness. Some people are naturally quieter and less outgoing than others, and as long as they are happy about who they are it is not a problem. If everyone was the same it would be a boring world.

WHAT IS SHYNESS?

Shyness is when children do not join in with others but they would like to.

IT CAN MEAN

- ▶ not speaking to others, even when asked a direct question
- ▶ not taking part in games and activities
- ▶ not going into places such as the school playground unless they are with someone they know
- ▶ being very embarrassed if they get attention - even good attention.

Most babies between about 6 months and 3 years old are "shy" in that they are afraid of strangers and likely to cling to the people they know well. This is a normal part of developing trust in our world. By the time they are three or four most children want to join in and play with others, at least some of the time.

WHAT'S GOOD AND WHAT'S HARD ABOUT SHYNESS?

THE GOOD

- ▶ Shy children are not likely to get into trouble for misbehaving.
- ▶ Shy children are often liked by adults because they are easy to care for.
- ▶ Shy children are often liked by children because they are not aggressive.
- ▶ Shy children are often good listeners.

THE HARD

- ▶ Shy children may be unhappy and lonely.
- ▶ They do not get practice in learning to get on with others.
- ▶ They are often overlooked by teachers and other adults.
- ▶ Shyness can cause stress which leads to physical problems such as tummy aches and headaches.
- ▶ Shy children may miss out on lots of opportunities.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- ▶ Set a good example - if you are friendly to others your child will feel safer and will learn what to say and do.
- ▶ If you are a worrier it may make your children feel that the world is a scary place and they will be more likely to be shy.
- ▶ Try not to show that you are fearful and as children get older you can explain that it is your problem and not something that they need to worry about.
- ▶ It can help to make sure they spend time with other adults who are less fearful.
- ▶ Check what other parents around you do to protect their children to give you a guide about whether you are being too protective of your children.
- ▶ Don't expect too much of your children. Encourage them and enjoy their successes but setting standards too high can mean that they will always feel they cannot really please you and this can help make children shy.
- ▶ Give your child lots of opportunities to meet with different people of all ages. But don't force it -let it go at a pace that the child feels comfortable with.
- ▶ Encourage children to take part in hobbies and interests that they enjoy - they will get to know other children with similar interests and learn some new skills.



IF YOUR CHILD IS SHY

- ▶ Don't label your child as shy either to herself, to yourself, or to others. Parents' judgements have a very powerful effect on children, and if the child hears you say she is shy, she will believe that she is.
- ▶ Never make fun of your child's fears or shyness.
- ▶ Help your child to learn skills so she is confident at whatever other children of her age are doing.
- ▶ Don't answer for your children, or apologise for them if they do not answer when spoken to. This draws more attention to their shyness.
- ▶ Encourage your child to talk about her feelings and fears and listen for thoughts that say "I can't" rather than "I can" - [see the topic 'Optimism']. Help her to think about the times she has succeeded rather than when she has failed!
- ▶ Get your child to make a list of the things he would like to do.
- ▶ Help him to think of what he might do to make them happen.
- ▶ You may have to make some suggestions at first, but what a child manages for himself will help his confidence more than your solutions.
- ▶ Give your child support if he is teased.
- ▶ Take new things at the child's pace - give him time to get used to new situations.
- ▶ For example if he is just starting preschool try to arrange to stay with him for the first few times and then gradually spend less time there as he gets more used to it.
- ▶ It is not helpful to force children to do things they are afraid of - help your child to confront problem situations gradually, a little at a time.
- ▶ Practice what to do in new or scary situations for your child. Make up some "new things to do" games, where you practise what she can do and say in a new or difficult situation.
- ▶ Invite another child to play, for a short time at first, and arrange something to do to take the pressure off the child at first.
- ▶ Try to arrange for the child to have an opportunity to be a helper for another child sometimes.
- ▶ Try to arrange for the child to have some special (looked-for) responsibilities at school.
- ▶ Try some meditation or relaxation exercises.
- ▶ For teenagers, assertiveness training courses can sometimes help.
- ▶ If trying the above suggestions does not help, talk to a child health professional about it.

CHILDREN WHO ARE SHY OFTEN NEED INDIVIDUAL ATTENTION AND AN OPPORTUNITY TO SHINE IN WAYS WHERE THEY FEEL SAFE.