

Your Child's Self-Esteem: Are You Helping or Hurting?

What does it take to raise competent, good-natured children who can feel a healthy respect for themselves? Research has shown over and over that good parenting involves two basic components. One will not surprise you, but the other one may catch you off guard.

We are very aware today that children are born with different personalities and temperaments that are not created by their parents. Nevertheless, parents do make a big difference, and here in the United States we need to get back on track regarding what children's self-esteem is really all about.



What are the two parenting ingredients that make for good self-esteem? First, good parents are warm and sensitive to a child's needs. They understand their child's positive as well as negative feelings. They are comforting in times of crisis and pain, as well as appreciative in times of triumph and Accomplishment. They are supportive of a child's individuality and encourage his or her growing independence.

That's no big news flash.

Good Parents Are Also Demanding

What we often overlook, though, is that good parents are also demanding. They clearly communicate high—but not unrealistic—expectations for their children's behavior. Good behavior and achievements are appreciated and reinforced when they occur. When the kids act up, on the other hand, Mom and Dad respond with firm limits, but not with fits of temper or righteous indignation. After a child makes a mistake, the parents' message is, "I'm sure you'll do better next time."

Parents whose child-rearing philosophy involves both warmth and "demandingness" tend to produce competent children. There are of course no guarantees, but their kids will have a better chance of becoming more self-reliant, self-controlled and happier. They will have a better chance of being accepted and well-liked by their peers, and of having a sense of belonging.

Sometimes, though, parents have blinders on. We're so busy, we don't have time—or take the time—to do some of the things that will really foster self-esteem. Such as what? Such as helping our children develop social skills and academic and physical competence. Your kids' self-esteem is ultimately going to be earned or not earned in the real world—not in a fantasy world.

Kids Do Better When They Learn Boundaries

The demanding part of the parenting equation implies not only that parents ask more of their kids, but also that parents ask more of themselves. We often follow the misguided belief that self-esteem and creativity are both higher when children can 'do their own thing' and when they are not exposed to external limits imposed by adults.

On the contrary, kids feel better about themselves and perform better, creatively and otherwise, when they learn the boundaries for reasonable behavior. The world has all kinds of limits and rules, and parents are the

ones who introduce children to life's boundaries. How parents establish rules and set limits—or fail to set limits—has a tremendous effect on the self-esteem of a child. Your kids may not like all the rules and regulations you must teach them, but if they don't recognize and work within these constraints, they will get hurt badly.

However, not all self-esteem building strategies involve unpleasant or hard work. One of the best “tactics” for encouraging healthy self-respect in children is fun. We need to take time with our kids. Keep in mind that one-on-one time having fun together is one of the most potent self-esteem builders. That's one parent with one child. Kids really like having a parent all to themselves.

What is the quickest and easiest way to learn a warm and demanding parenting approach? The program, [1-2-3 Magic: Effective Discipline for Children 2-12](#), embodies what warm and demanding parenting is all about. 1-2-3 Magic's three parenting steps, Controlling Obnoxious Behavior, Encouraging Good Behavior, and Strengthening Your Relationship With Your Child, require that parents be supportive and nurturing while at the same time they are expecting constructive behavior as well as hard work from their kids.
