

# Raising CONFIDENT KIDS

Healthy self-esteem is key to success in later life, but the foundations for our self-worth are laid very early on, in our childhood. Charlotte Butterfield finds out what we can do to encourage our little ones to be confident

**MY FIFTEEN-MONTH-OLD'S FAVOURITE PASTIME AT THE MOMENT IS TO TODDLE OVER TO THE HALL MIRROR AND KISS HIMSELF.** He is so delighted with seeing his reflection he beams, giggles, and then lunges. It begs the question, how can a baby's strong sense of self-love develop into a child's self-loathing, and why? How can we as parents encourage our children to develop a solid self-esteem and a confidence in their abilities that will see them through to adulthood, and actually, why is this important?

"As children start to develop a better sense of who they are, they also start to compare themselves to other people, which impacts directly on their own self-esteem," says Dr Amy Bailey, clinical psychologist and head of psychology at kidsFIRST Medical Center. "Children that see themselves positively are more likely to develop good relationships in the future and have better resilience and coping skills. Once individuals reach adulthood, feelings of self-worth become more entrenched personality traits and have a negative impact on future expectations, behaviour, social interactions and relationships and overall psychological well-being."

Madeeha Afridi, a counselling psychologist at The LightHouse Arabia Clinic, agrees: "Developing self-confidence in children builds the foundation of a positive and secure sense of self in adulthood. Self-confidence leads to other traits such as self-reliance, self-worth, self-esteem, which nurture a sense of hopefulness, responsibility and ownership of our own emotions, behaviour and responses to life events."

But what if a child doesn't learn how to cope with failure and this armour of resilience the experts say is so important doesn't materialise? Dr Valeria Risoli, clinical psychologist at Dubai Physiotherapy & Family Medicine Clinic, says that it's important that low self-esteem in childhood is recognised and addressed, as it often leads to adults who project their low self-confidence on to future relationships. "They tend to seek out other people who also have low self-esteem and poor confidence because insecure people make them feel adequate. They are adults who are less likely to be successful because they are fearful of risk and being exposed to challenging situations. As children these adults were probably compared to others in a negative way and this led them to become reluctant to any kind of environment that requires them to compete or work together with others. In their mind, others are always perceived as more adequate, validated as more successful, more intelligent, in a word 'better' people."

## How to spot low self-esteem

It's not unusual for all children to go through periods of self-doubt – of course they are not always going to be the maths champion, or be the fastest swimmer – but it is how they learn to deal with failure as a child that will set them up to be emotionally healthy adults. It's also important to be vigilant for signs of bullying or potential learning difficulties, as both can affect a child's self-esteem.

Dr Amy Bailey says that there are several signs of low-esteem to watch out for, which include avoiding tasks without even trying, and being reluctant to try anything new; behaving

**"Acquiring a strong sense of self-confidence when young equips children with armour to face the challenges of life"**

in a controlling or bossy manner; a regression to baby-like behaviour; mood swings, anxiety and sadness; being withdrawn or socially isolated from their peers; blaming themselves for any small failure; and they may find it difficult to accept both criticism or praise. It's important to get to the source of why they feel under pressure to be the best – is this something they are putting on themselves, does it come from their peer group, teacher, you? Perfectionists almost always measure their value by what they achieve and not by who they are, so it's vital to teach your children that constantly comparing themselves to others is not healthy and their feelings are the most important, not their achievements.

## What is healthy SELF-ESTEEM?

It occurs when "a person has a positive and realistic self-worth. These people value themselves and like what they see in the mirror, physically and mentally. They can objectively see and validate their own strengths and at the same time accept their imperfections and weaknesses."

"People with an unhealthy self-esteem have a distorted or unrealistic perception of self. They can't recognise their weaknesses so self-acceptance is not possible. They are constantly trying to portray and project a different image of self and may set up a facade of confidence and self-worth that masks their feelings of inadequacy and insecurity."

– Dr Valeria Risoli

