



The 3, 4 and 5-Year-Old Child: Self-Esteem

The preschool years are exciting times for children. Each day preschoolers discover more and more about themselves and their world. During these years children gain new skills, abilities and knowledge. This fact sheet will help you understand preschool children. It's important to remember that the information in this factsheet is only a guide. Children grow and develop at their own rates.

Developing positive self-esteem in your child

A child with healthy self-esteem feels loved and capable. Her good feelings about herself will shine through in everything she does. She is likely to take on new responsibilities and try to learn new skills, like riding a bike. She will work hard to do well in school and probably grow up to be a productive member of society.



Can parents and others help children feel good about themselves? The answer is “yes.” Children feel loved and sure of themselves if adults are warm and loving and give smiles, hugs and words of encouragement. If adults scold, yell at, hit, or make humiliating remarks at children, they’ll feel unimportant and unloved. To help your child develop good self-esteem:

- Try to be fair when giving praise to your children. If a brother or sister receives something special, explain why. Tell your preschooler that you love him just as much as his sibling. Try to give equal amounts of attention to all of your children.
- Give your child plenty of affection (hugging, kissing, holding). Tell her you love her very much. Show your love by spending time with your child.
- Answer your child’s questions honestly and right away. When adults listen to and talk to children, they feel respected. They know they are worthy and valued.
- Help your child learn to do things for himself. Encourage him to make his bed or dress himself. Even if he can’t do the job well, he’ll feel proud when you recognize that he’s trying. With practice, he’ll put his shirt on right-side-out and line up buttons with the right button holes. In the meantime, tell him his attempts are good and the mistakes are okay!
- Accept a child’s feelings and help her put them into words. Talk about why she feels angry or unhappy. Sometimes, just talking about those feelings will help her to feel better.
- If your child says, “I hate you,” try not to overreact. To your preschooler, the word “hate” is just another word. To him it’s a way of saying, “I don’t like what’s going on here.” Help him explain why he’s angry at you. Help him find a solution to the problem. For example, say “I think you’re angry because you need to stop playing now. Would you like me to help you put the toys away or can you do that yourself?”

By helping your child develop a good self-esteem day in and day out, you pave the way for her to grow into a well-adjusted adult.

Alternatives to hitting your child

Sometimes the big and little problems of your everyday life pile up. When you feel like hitting, slapping or spanking your child - STOP. Take some time to cool down. Don't take your frustrations out on your child. Try any or all of these simple ideas. Do whatever works for you.

- Stop in your tracks. Step back. Sit down.
- Take five deep breaths. Inhale. Exhale. Slowly, slowly.
- Count to 10. Better yet, 20. Or say the alphabet out loud.
- Phone a friend or relative. Call the weather station.
- Still mad? Punch a pillow. Munch an apple.
- Thumb through a magazine, book, newspaper, or photo album.
- Do some sit-ups.
- Pick up a pencil and write down your thoughts.
- Take a hot bath. Or, take a cold shower.
- Put on your favorite record.
- Water your plants.
- Call the New Hampshire Task Force to Prevent Child Abuse at 225-5441.
- Lie down on the floor. Put your feet up.

Sources:

Cooperative Extension publications by Judith A. Hooper, University of Wisconsin Extension, Betsy R. Schenck, Virginia Cooperative Extension Service, Billie H. Frazier, University of Maryland Cooperative Extension

Reference:

National Committee to Prevent Child Abuse

Additional Resources:

For other publications on child growth and development, or for information about parenting, call your county UNH Cooperative Extension office.

UNH Cooperative Extension County Office Telephone Numbers

Belknap

(603) 527-5475

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