

Your Child's Self-esteem

Will parents' child-rearing practices affect their child's later self-esteem in school?

Results of research studies of school-aged children appear to shed some light on this important question.

Researchers have generally defined self-esteem as the positive or negative evaluations one makes of oneself.

Children with high self-esteem in school, for example, see themselves as accomplishing their own personal goals.

Those with low self-esteem perceive a discrepancy between who they are and who they would like to be.

Even though your child is just three years old, certain patterns of child-rearing practices in the home appear to be important for the development of later self-esteem in school.

The parents of children with high self-esteem were found, in general, to have the following characteristics:

- (1) They listened attentively to what their child had to say.
- (2) They praised and encouraged independence.
- (3) They were clear and consistent in establishing rules for their child's behavior.
- (4) They provided their child with much emotional warmth and affection in the home.

On the other hand, it was found that children who were repeatedly told at home they were "stupid," "irresponsible," or "immature" were more likely to develop a low opinion of themselves and

to underestimate their abilities in school.

The parents of children with low self-esteem were also more likely to combine permissiveness at home with intermittent, severe punishment for misbehavior.

Of course, it is not easy for parents to always exhibit the positive characteristics that will foster high self-esteem in a child. It requires a great deal of patience, perseverance, and self-control.

This effort, however, appears to be well worthwhile in promoting a child's psychological well-being.

When children with high self-esteem

in school were compared with children with low self-esteem, they were found to be more self-confident, earn better grades, have more friends, and view their relationship with their parents more positively.

The seeds of a child's positive self-esteem apparently are sown in the home during the important preschool years.

The key parental attributes that foster positive self-esteem appear to be encouragement of a young child's ideas and sense of independence, combined with a clear and firm pattern of discipline, provided within a warm and loving home environment. ■

Pretend Play

Whether your child is playing alone or with a friend, at home or at her preschool, pretend play—role-playing—has become an important part of her life.

Role-playing serves many functions for your child at 40 months. Perhaps you have overheard her having a tea party, assuming the roles of mommy and her friends.

Or as you walked past her bedroom, you may have heard her say: "Vroom ... vroom ... hurry to the fire! Get out the fire hoses."

Although at 40 months Youngster is still basically a self-centered individual, she is becoming increasingly aware of the world around her.

In the months and years to come, your child will pretend to be mommy, daddy, baby, big sister, doctor, nurse, firefighter and police officer—all the people with whom she has come into contact.

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And whether boy or girl, it makes no difference which role your child assumes at this young age.

According to Jean Piaget, the noted Swiss psychologist, “one of the functions of symbolic play is to satisfy the self by transforming what is real into what is desired.”

The child remakes her own life as she would like it to be. She relives all her pleasures, resolves all her conflicts, and above all, completes reality by means of make-believe.

Youngster is developing a new concept of herself and a new awareness of the world around her. Symbolic or imaginative play is one of the ways in which she incorporates all that she is learning.

She must act out repeatedly what she sees and hears in order to absorb and assimilate these new ideas.

It is good to remember that at this age, it is often difficult for Youngster to distin-

guish between fantasy and reality.

This is one reason why a nightmare may seem so real or why some children suddenly need a light on at night.

Her imaginative play helps her to test the difference between real and make-believe.

In addition, pretend play provides a *positive* way for your 40-month-old to act out her fears and hostilities.

By having an opportunity to play out her feelings in fantasy, she will be able to master emotions which could otherwise overwhelm her.

It has been said that play is the work of children. Children learn through play.

Many child development experts maintain that never again will imaginative play be as important as at nursery school age. Pretend play is related to later school success—it is important!

How do you encourage imaginative play?

Primarily through your words of love and encouragement. You can create an atmosphere where your child feels free to “pretend.”

You can also provide her with toys she likes to use in her imaginative play such as hats, telephones, dolls and dishes, cars and trucks, nurse and doctor kits. Such toys need not be expensive.

As you will notice, your child at 40 months enjoys things that can be used in a *variety of ways*, ways that she will discover for herself.

In addition, we suggest that you read to your child every day. Good children’s books stimulate her imagination and expand her ideas.

And since your child is not only a keen observer but also a delightful companion at this age, she is ready to travel with you past the confines of her home into the neighborhoods of an ever-widening world.■

Listen Closely

At 40 months children still are developing the ability to make all of the sounds and sound combinations correctly in their speech. At this age we want to encourage an abundance of speech rather than precision.

Before children can express the differences in speech sounds, they have to pay attention to the differences in other kinds of sounds. Therefore, they need to begin by identifying sounds that are the same from those that are different.

Select two grossly different sound-makers such as a whistle and a drum. Tell Youngster, “Listen to these sounds and tell me if they are the same or different.” You then make each sound.

Reinforce Youngster’s correct response, “Yes, you’re right—they are different,” or

“No, they’re not the same, they’re different.”

Make sure later to include two sounds that are the same to test Youngster’s ability to recognize sameness.

Next, increase the complexity by asking Youngster to turn his back while you produce the sounds. Now the decision of “same” or “different” will be made exclusively by listening.

When the accuracy reaches five out of five trials, you’re ready to move on to other sounds, namely speech sounds.

When you start with speech sounds, select those which are different just as you did when you chose sound-makers.

Tell Youngster, “Listen to these sounds: ‘aaaaa’ (pause), ‘sssss.’ Are they the same or

different?”

It is preferable to concentrate upon the sounds which the alphabet letters represent (“rrrrr”) and not upon the letters’ names (“R”).

Be sure to reinforce the correct response, “Yes, you are right. They are not the same,” or “No, they are not the same, they’re different.”

Now it’s time to introduce sounds that are the same. “Listen. Are these the same or different: ‘chchchch’ (pause), ‘chchchch?’”

Again reinforce the correct answer, “Yes, they are the same.”

Later in this issue we will describe some activities which can teach a child listening discrimination. (See “Attention-getters” on page 245).■

Prosocial Behavior

“Let Jennifer play with your doll while you’re playing with the play dough.”

“Johnny, don’t throw sand.”

“Mary, remember you have to wait your turn.”

A preschooler’s parents are undoubtedly familiar with these exhortations. At one time or another, every youngster gets in trouble and needs to learn how to behave appropriately.

Have you noticed, however, that some preschoolers more often interact negatively with their peers, for example, being bossy or inconsiderate of another’s feelings?

By contrast, other preschoolers generally behave in ways that help or benefit the other person, for example, by giving a hug to a child who is crying.

Psychologists use the term “prosocial behavior” for these positive, supportive, helping acts.

To have a prosocial orientation means to be a caring person, to experience empathy for others, to wish to interact positively with others.

In recent years many research studies have been conducted on different aspects of prosocial behavior. The questions for which researchers have sought answers should intrigue any preschooler’s parents.

At what age does prosocial behavior begin? Is there developmental progression in a child’s prosocial reasoning?

How does a child acquire prosocial behaviors—or their opposite: antisocial behaviors? What effects can parents have on their child’s development of prosocial behaviors?

It has been observed that even infants will cry at the sound of another baby crying. While this could be merely imitating behavior, it may actually be the first signs of human sharing of another’s feelings.

Certainly by two years of age some toddlers will try to comfort another child in



distress, for example, by offering to share a teddy bear or a favorite toy.

Infants and young children, however, are by nature egocentric: They see the world only from their own point of view.

This does not necessarily mean that they are always selfish or egotistical. It simply means that they are not yet capable of seeing things from another person’s perspective.

For example, three-and-a-half-year-old Paul thinks his Mom would like a toy truck for her birthday because that’s what he wants.

One of the major tasks of the early childhood years is to move from an egocentric view of the world to one in which other perspectives are considered.

As a child’s egocentrism decreases and perspective-taking abilities develop, there is an increase in prosocial behaviors. And as children become more sensitive to other people’s feelings and intentions—usually between three and seven years of age—their concepts of friendship and interpersonal relationships also change.

Gift giving, for example, is a way of establishing and maintaining social interaction.

For the egocentric child, a gift may be anything—a pebble, a piece of twine, or something that doesn’t even belong to her.

The gift is not intended to be permanent. The recipient is expected to give it back as soon as the child considers the social interaction to have ended.

By contrast, for the child who has developed perspective-taking ability, a gift has a more permanent quality. “I know you would feel sad if I asked you to give that back to me.”

During the preschool years there is a gradual development—related to the development of perspective-taking—in a child’s empathy for another child’s pain or distress.

Likewise, there is generally an increase in helping behaviors (“What can I do, Mom?”) and in cooperative activities to achieve a common goal (“I’ll do this while you’re working on that.”).

In studying cooperative tasks, researchers have found that when three- and four-year-olds were asked to divide rewards for a group task, they simply took the largest share for themselves regardless of how much they had contributed to achievement of the task.

They were generally more concerned with egocentric consequences rather than with any moral consideration of justice or fairness.

Their reasons for helping another child included such considerations as direct gain to themselves, future reciprocity from the child they helped, or concern for others whom they liked or needed.

By contrast, six-year-old children were found to be more capable of using concepts of fairness and equality when dividing rewards.

They were also found to be more sensitive than three- and four-year-olds to subtle signs of distress such as a change in a facial expression as distinct from a loud cry.

What kind of family environment contributes to the development of prosocial behavior in young children?

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Researchers have found that parents who explicitly and repeatedly stated their expectations to their child regarding appropriate behavior had toddlers who exhibited more prosocial behavior.

The most successful parents were those who focused on encouraging and rewarding positive prosocial behaviors, rather than on the elimination of undesirable, antisocial behaviors.

Providing a child with justification for prosocial behavior—spelling out the consequences of behavior—was found to be more effective than merely issuing a command.

For example, a parent can explain to a child how her behavior might emotionally affect another child, or how the parent might take some corrective measure if the child had physically or emotionally hurt someone else.

Children who had a firm sense of inner security were found to be less withdrawn, more sympathetic to another's distress, and were more likely to be leaders. They were also the ones with whom other children liked to play.

A related research finding was that children who perceived their parents as warm and loving were found to exhibit generous,

supportive, and cooperative behaviors. But researchers have found an interesting distinction among these parents.

When parents offer their child warmth and rewards excessively and needlessly, they may foster indulgence in their child—the spoiled child syndrome—which restricts the development of prosocial behavior.

Parental love is most effective in promoting prosocial behavior when it is provided in response to the child's own expressed need for affection.

In a child's development of prosocial behavior, how the parents behave is more important than what they say. The dictum, "Do as I say, not as I do," carries no weight with children.

When a child observes an adult or peer engaging in prosocial behavior—for example, giving someone a helping hand—the likelihood of the child performing that prosocial act is increased.

The findings from these research studies indicate that children can be taught to be more caring, to experience empathy for someone in distress, and to interact positively with others.

It is during the important preschool years that the foundations for prosocial behavior are established.■

Egg Carton Problem

This is a problem-solving game. Get an egg carton. Choose any twelve of these little objects (or a workable substitute) and put one in each compartment.

1. Rubber band.
2. Threaded needle.
3. Bit of cloth.
4. Paper clip.
5. Button.
6. Bit of paper.
7. Piece of string.
8. Pipe cleaner or wire.
9. Cut-off piece of a straw.
10. Stick of chewing gum.
11. White glue.
12. Safety pin.
13. Bottle cap.
14. Cork.
15. Piece of elbow macaroni.
16. Feather.
17. Toothpick.
18. Piece of cardboard with one slot cut in it.
19. Band-aid.

The task is to attach each of these objects—in your mind—to at least one other object.

Tell the child, "Show me which things you think go together, and see if you can tell me why."

Safety note: Do not leave the egg carton unattended. Some of the items can be dangerous if swallowed or used improperly.■



A Healthy Lifestyle

Good habits—like bad habits—are established early in one's life. It's not too soon to teach your child how to develop a healthy lifestyle.

Here are some guidelines:

- Make sure that you and your child have some active physical exercise every day.
- Develop a well-balanced program of nutritional meals. Seek the help of a physician or nutritionist, if necessary, in establishing a sound nutritional program for the family.
- Make mealtimes a pleasant time for the whole family to enjoy being together.
- Choose a time other than mealtime to discuss unpleasant topics such as behavior problems.
- Remember that for three-year-olds, breakfast is a most important meal. They need a good breakfast for the activities of the rest of the day. Good breakfast foods include cereal, toast, milk, peanut butter, fruits, and yogurt.

Adjust your schedule so that the time for breakfast is not rushed—even if that means getting up earlier in the morning or going to bed earlier the night before.

Studies of children's nutritional needs indicate that the current obsession with weight loss is having a detrimental effect on the younger generation. The reason is that a child's metabolism functions differently from that of an adult.

Although adults often need to cut back on their intake of calories, a low-calorie diet doesn't provide three-year-olds with the nutrition they need for daily exercise and growth.

If you think your child is overweight, it is wise to consult your physician.

If the physician agrees that your child has a weight problem, get specific instructions about an appropriate diet program or ask for referral to a professional nutritionist.

The goals for weight loss are very different for a young child than for an adult. An

overweight child can often attain normal weight through increased physical exercise combined with avoidance of foods such as fudge or cream-filled cookies.

Above all, avoid the "feast-and-famine" routine practiced by many overweight adults.

The best way to prevent weight problems in children is to know what to avoid. Here are some guidelines:

- Avoid letting your child spend too much time in purely inactive pursuits, such as watching TV.

Make a daily trip to a nearby park where Youngster can run and jump and enjoy slides and swings.

- Avoid giving candy or pop as treats or rewards. Instead, take your child to the local swimming pool or children's activity center (for example, YWCA or YMCA) as a special reward.
- Avoid too many snacks between meals. If you find your child experiences hunger between lunch and dinner time, make the snack a regular part of the daily routine, rather than providing several little snacks at haphazard times.

Be sure the snack provides Youngster with nutritional foods such as raw fruits, vegetables, bread and jam, or unsalted crackers.

- Avoid overindulgence in "fast-food" meals that are high in saturated fat but low in nutritional value. Instead give her the good nutritional meals she needs.
- Avoid overindulgence in soft drinks for Youngster to quench her thirst. Because of her active life she needs to drink lots of liquids. So, provide her with milk, fruit juice, and several glasses of water every day.

In order to develop a healthy body, Youngster needs vitamins, minerals, fiber, and proteins.

Regular well-balanced nutritional meals, combined with daily physical exercise, are Youngster's best passport to a healthy lifestyle.■

Attention-getters

These attention-getting games help to teach your child listening discrimination.

They can also be used to quiet down an overactive child or to calm a fretful one.

1. Whisper Directions.

The purpose of this game is to gain your child's attention and help her to learn to discriminate between sounds.

It may be necessary to repeat your instructions:

"When I make a quiet (or soft) sound, raise your hand." (Show what raising the hand means.)

Examples of quiet sounds: tap pencil on paper, snap fingers, click tongue.

"When I make a loud sound, clap your hands."

Examples of loud sounds—drop a block on the floor, shut the door, stomp foot.

2. "What's Making This Sound?"

The purpose of this game is to help Youngster become more attentive to the various sounds in her environment.

It can also serve as a simple screening device for early identification of any hearing problem.

Ask her to stand in front of you with her back to you so that she cannot see what is making a sound.

Examples of sounds to guess: tearing paper, rattling keys, knocking on the table, blowing nose, opening a drawer, whistling.

Once the rules of these games are understood, allow Youngster to play leader and you do the guessing.■

Reading Begins at Home

Did you know that 50 percent of intellectual development takes place between birth and four years of age?

That means that parents are important teachers. You provide the foundation of your child's learning skills right within your own home.

You can shape the course of your child's educational future by the quality of learning experiences you provide before he or she ever goes to school.

Here are six watchwords designed to help you make the most of your child's early learning experiences:

Listen: Listen to your child. Pay attention to what he or she is saying. Call attention to sounds.

Listening and attaching meaning to sounds are essential skills that must be acquired before a child can read or succeed in a classroom environment.

Speak: Talk with your child. Direct conversation to him or her from infancy. Help your child learn to distinguish sounds and imitate them.

Take a walk together. Talk about the things you see and hear. Help the child classify objects as you see them: foods, plants, farm animals, birds, and so on.

Sing to your child. This teaches enjoyment of music and rhythm.

Read: Read to your child every day. Make reading seem enjoyable. Then it will be a skill he or she will want to acquire.

Let the child choose a favorite book or story to read. When you read stories, stop in the middle and ask your child what will happen next.

Talk about the pictures. Have your child point to objects in the pictures.

When your child is old enough, write down words as he or she says them. Let



the child know that printed material is really "printed talk."

Take your child to the library. Let him or her see books there. Buy books that "belong" to your child. Provide a place for your child's books at home.

Remember, if the child sees you reading, then reading becomes something useful in his or her mind.

Move: Help your child roll over, crawl, stand, and walk. This develops muscle control.

Let your child explore. Provide safe play objects such as boxes of different sizes, blocks, scraps of cloth with different tex-

tures, spoons, and pans.

Through these experiences, you can help teach such concepts as wet, dry, soft, hard, inside, outside, under, over, and others such as those of order: first, second, third, and so on.

Interact: Help your child learn that he or she is a part of a family group. Include your child in planning family activities. Give encouragement and praise when it is merited.

Guard: Control and limit your child's television viewing.

Search out better TV programs for children and share them with your child.

Talk about the programs your child watches (and watch with them). Correct any misconceptions that may have developed from them.■

**Growing
Child**

P. O. Box 2505 • W Lafayette, IN 47996
(800) 927-7289
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www.GrowingChild.com

Contributing Authors

Phil Bach, O.D., Ph.D.
Miriam Bender, Ph.D.
Joseph Braga, Ed.D.
Laurie Braga, Ph.D.
George Early, Ph.D.
Carol R. Gestwicki, M.S.
Liam Grimley, Ph.D.
Robert Hannemann, M.D., F.A.A.P.
Sylvia Kottler, M.S.
Bill Peterson, Ph.D.

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While all of this material may not apply to your child right now, it does include many objectives of Growing Child. The ideas presented are important and worth reading.