



Texas Agricultural Extension Service  
The Texas A&M University System

# Parenting Young Children

## Promoting A Positive Self-Concept In Children...

*Your 3-year-old daughter is trying to dress herself. She gets the shirt and jeans on correctly but puts her socks on inside out. Will she be more likely to get them right next time if you say, "Oh, Nancy, you put your socks on wrong again. Why can't you remember that the fuzzy part goes on the inside?" or "Good! You got your shirt and jeans on right. Why don't you just change your socks so the fuzzy part is inside."*

The best response, of course, is the second one, because it emphasizes what Nancy did right and is more likely to make her feel confident. And when children have confidence in themselves, they do better. They are eager to try new and harder things; they gain new skills and become even more confident and capable. Self-confidence (high self-esteem) leads to success. On the other hand, when children think they cannot do anything right, they are afraid to try new things. They expect to fail. They avoid new challenges, so they never learn that they can do things. Their confidence never gets a chance to develop. Self-doubt (low self-esteem) results in failure. To a large extent then, we become what we think we are:

***Those who think they can do -- do!***                      ***Those who***  
***think they cannot — do not!***

This is true for all of us, but it is especially true for young children. The responses of parents and other adults have a powerful effect on children's actions. Adult reactions actually teach children how competent or incompetent they are. Have you noticed how proud your children are of their accomplishments? They often urge you to "Watch this!" or "Look at what I made!" Young children need to be seen as capable and strong, but they lack the skills and knowledge that grown-ups have. The list of things they can do is much shorter than the list of things they cannot do. They really need your help in learning that they can do things.

To many parents "common sense" says, "If I want my children to become capable, I must be sure to point out and correct all their mistakes." But constant criticism only teaches children that they cannot do things very well. When parents emphasize what their children do right, however, they help children feel good about themselves. By letting children know how it feels to succeed, parents encourage children to keep trying.

To help your children develop confidence in themselves, try these ideas:

- Focus on your children's strengths and successes.
- Show them you have faith in their abilities.
- Provide them with experience for success.
- Reflect their achievements in a positive but realistic manner.

Of course no parent can, or would want to, keep children from every possibility of failing. Children learn from failure as

well as success. Children who have learned they are capable can accept their mistakes and weaknesses because they know that overall they are competent.

As the old saying goes, "Nothing teaches like success." To let your children enjoy the sweet taste of success, set up an environment where initiative is more likely to lead to success than to failure:

- Dress your children in sturdy clothes that are easy to put on.
- Provide step stools and low hooks so they can do things for themselves.
- Buy plastic dishes and glasses to prevent accidents.
- Offer them a variety of physical, mental, and social experiences.

### **Encouragement**

Self-confidence is like a ripple. When children feel capable in one area, the feeling is likely to spread to other areas of their lives. This ripple often begins when the child receives encouragement from parents.

Encouragement builds and restores a child's self-confidence. Misbehavior is the usual outcome of discouragement. It is so much more satisfying to behave properly that most children would if they had confidence in their ability to succeed. Our methods of disciplining (training) children are often a sequence of discouraging experiences, through either impossible demands, humiliations, indulgences, over-permissiveness, or neglect. However, few adults know how to give it.

Encouragement is more than praise. In fact, praise often causes discouragement because the children consider it either as being undeserved or as your wish for them to succeed beyond their capacity. Encouragement expresses faith in children as they are, not in what they could be. Which of these phrases, if said to you, would make you feel more encouraged (positive) about yourself? "That's very hard. I'll do it for you." or "That's hard but I believe you can do it." Or try this one, "There is still a sock in the corner." or "This room is looking much neater. I know you enjoy living in it when it is clean." In both cases, the second response makes a person feel better and elicits cooperation.

### **Here are some other examples of encouraging, rather than discouraging words:**

<b>Words That Encourage</b>	<b>Words that Discourage</b>
You can do it!	You usually make mistakes, so be careful.
I have faith in you.	I doubt that you can do it.
You're doing well.	You can do better.
I enjoyed that song.	Your music is getting better, but you missed some notes at the end.
I can see you put a lot of effort into that.	That is a good job, but the corners aren't perfect.
Your playing has improved.	Well, you are playing a little better than last year.
You'll figure it out.	You had better get some help; that looks very difficult.

Other helpful phrases to put in your vocabulary and use sincerely with your children are "That's a hard job," "You did a good job with..." "I appreciate what you did," "Let's figure this out together." Use specific instances to encourage, not global praise. Say, "You took a good swing at the ball," not "You are the best batter I ever saw." Remember, every time you use the opportunity to encourage your child, you are helping to build a strong person who can be happy and self-confident.

### **Parental Power**

As a parent, be careful in your use of power. It is important for parents to establish and enforce reasonable rules and

limits. However, turn control over to your children gradually as they grow older. Responsible children who are self-disciplined have parents who teach decision making and who allow children to learn from the consequences of their choices.

If parents dominate children and use superior knowledge and strength to suppress the natural need for influence, children are stripped of self-respect and experience a loss of self-esteem.

When self-respect is lost (or not developed) the potential for violence and deviant behavior is fostered. Children who feel powerless often behave destructively towards themselves and/or others. This acting out is an undesirable attempt at gaining some control over their environment.

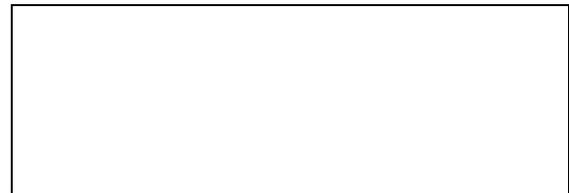
As a parent, use your power wisely while demonstrating respect and appreciation for your child's growing need for self-determination and a strong self-concept.

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***For more information on parenting  
or if your organization would like  
a parenting program contact —***

*This*  *newsletter*  
*has been compiled to enrich and improve the lives of  
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