



WHO AM I?

Self Awareness: At a Glance

- Self-awareness involves “tuning in” to feelings and thoughts.
- Self-awareness helps kids learn that how they see themselves may be different from how others see them.
- Kids who are self-aware are more able to recognize their strengths as well as their weaknesses.
- Self-awareness is a skill that helps kids learn self-reflection and self-advocacy.

Types of Self-Awareness

Private self-awareness is when the child is aware of something about himself that other people might not be. For example, say the child has to read in front of the class. Recognizing the feeling of butterflies in his stomach as a signal that he’s nervous is private self-awareness.

Public self-awareness is when the child is aware of how other people are seeing him. This can be hard for kids who have trouble reading social cues. For example, say the child stands very close to other kids while talking. Noticing that he is making others uncomfortable and taking a step back is an example of public self-awareness.

How Self-Awareness Helps Kids

Private and public self-awareness work together to help the child understand that what he’s thinking and feeling—how he’s “seeing” himself—might not always be the way other people see him. When a child has good self-awareness skills, he:

- Recognizes his strengths and weaknesses
- Can identify what he needs to do to complete a task
- Recognizes errors in his work and makes edits or changes
- Can understand and talk about his feelings
- Sees how his behavior affects others

Kids who have self-awareness do a better job self-monitoring. That means the child is able keep track of what he’s doing (either in learning or socially) and figure out what’s working and what’s not working. Self-awareness also leads to self-reflection—thinking over things that happened in order to find ways to make things work better next time.

Ages & Stages | How Children Develop Self-Concept

Stage by Stage 0 - 2

- Babies need loving and consistent relationships to develop a positive sense of self.
- Tuning in to babies' preferences helps them develop a sense of self that is compatible with their innate characteristics.
- Gentle but firm limits help toddlers feel secure.
- Two-year-olds' emerging language propels their sense of self. "Me do" becomes their mantra.

Stage by Stage 3 - 4

- Threes and fours have the ability to see themselves as separate and unique individuals.
- The self-images of young children tend to be descriptive, rather than judgmental.
- Increasingly independent, preschoolers are intrigued by the new things they can do.

Stage by Stage 5 - 6

- Fives and sixes are transitioning from the "me" stage to the "us" stage, becoming aware of the needs and interests of the group.
- Kindergartners are now able to use words to communicate their needs and feelings.
- Five- and six-year-olds use the power of the word no to help define themselves within the group setting.



0 to 2 | "I'm me!"

by Carla Poole

Babies create a sense of self within loving relationships. Each baby is a unique blend of innate characteristics. Some babies are easily soothed, while others are more particular about what soothes them. Each teacher is also unique, responding to babies with their own characteristics and experiences. Caring for a baby is a joining together of two individuals who are searching to make a deep emotional connection.

Tuning in to Babies

Slow down and tune in to babies. Look for the baby's responses to different sounds, sights, and textures. This will help you understand the baby and his way of adapting to his environment. It helps him feel secure and begins his lifelong process of the development of self.

Learning About One Another

Just as you get to know a baby, the baby gets to know you. They are very good at reading facial expressions. At around 2 months, babies offer a "social smile," the first social response to others. Their budding self is affirmed when you smile back. This makes babies feel good - When I smile, you smile with me!

Blossoming Personalities

During his first year of consistent, loving relationships, a baby's behavior becomes more organized, and he communicates more clearly. A 9-month-old might vocalize as he reaches toward you to be picked up, or he might initiate a game of peekaboo. Responding to these requests helps a baby's sense of self blossom.

Exploring Their World

During the second year of life, toddlers form a sense of "I'm me! I can do it!" Their secure sense of self, of being loved in a special way by special people, fuels their self-directed explorations. Young toddlers need lots of

opportunities to initiate and direct their own activities.

Becoming Self-Conscious

Another important shift occurs at around 18 months, when the toddler becomes self-conscious for the first time. Twenty-month-old Kayla, for example, manages to unlatch the cupboard door to the diapering supplies. As she reaches into this forbidden territory, she glances over her shoulder, looking for her teacher. She is conscious of her teacher's reactions to her behavior. Toddlers are especially sensitive during this period and can feel shamed if they receive harsh criticism. Encourage toddlers' independence, curiosity, and exploration, while setting reasonable boundaries for their behavior. You can tell Kayla that she can't have the extra diapers, but she can open up another door that holds some stuffed animals or toys.

Emerging Language Skills

Two-year-olds' emerging language skills help them express themselves. Their mantra becomes "Me do! Not you!" Their feelings are strong, and their sense of self is still fragile, so they need to assert themselves and protest limits. Your role is to remain calm and to help them adapt to the demands of daily life. Consistency in limit setting is helpful, but it is also important to remain flexible. Try to build a partnership with each toddler. This way, the limits you set are reassuring, but don't squelch the toddler's sense of self.

Responding to Preferences

Helping babies create a positive sense of self requires a delicate balance between aiding them in developing in ways that are compatible with their innate qualities and helping them function in their social world. Respect for their individuality, their sense of self, helps build the self-confidence they need for the lifelong process of learning.

3 to 4 | "I can pump high!"

by Susan A. Miller, Ed.D

With a broad smile on his face, 4-year-old Aaron directs his teacher, Mrs. Gehringen "Watch how I pump the swing!" Proudly demonstrating his exciting new skill, he joyfully chants, "I'll fly so high, I'll reach the sky. I won't come back until the Fourth of July!" Mrs. Gehringer gives him two thumbs up and responds, "Great swinging, Aaron!" Aaron pumps the swing higher, his self-esteem soaring.

A Growing Self-image

In the dramatic-play center, Becca asks a new classmate, "Who are you?" The new girl eagerly responds, "I am Ella. I am 3. I have a baby sister. And look, I have a baby doll, too." Feeling autonomous, preschoolers like Aaron and Ella see themselves as separate and unique individuals. They define themselves in concrete terms. Included in this internal picture of the image that preschoolers have of themselves are such things as their physical attributes, names, ages, genders, social affiliations, possessions, and abilities. A young child's self-image tends to be descriptive, rather than judgmental.

The Image-Esteem Connection

How preschoolers feel about these characteristics relates to their self-esteem. For example, Aaron acquires a feeling of self-worth as a result of his interactions with others who are important to him, such as his teacher, who gave him immediate positive verbal and visual reinforcement about his swinging skills.

Although forming one's self-concept is a lifelong process, how the child feels about himself in the early years (positive or negative) can set a pattern for the rest of his life.

A Critical Time for Success

Because threes and fours are growing so fast and developing in every way as they learn new



skills and sharpen old ones, the preschool years are a critical time for successful experiences.

Children need to be able to absorb information about how others respond to them in order to confirm how they feel about themselves.

Becoming more independent, preschoolers are intrigued by what they can do. For instance, exhibiting greatly increased fine-muscle control, preschoolers confidently execute tasks they will need to perform throughout their lives. Four-year-old Kennedy enthusiastically holds his pencil just like his teacher does while they draw and "write" a story together about bugs. With great self-satisfaction, 3-year-old Esther sparkles when she is complimented by her mom for copying a pattern of colored circles with her crayons.

Three-year-old Luis feels good about himself when he shows off his intellectual abilities, counting out juice cups, "one, two, three," and passing one to each child at his snack table. And with an astounding vocabulary of more than 4,000 words, 4-year-old Julie feels pleased when her buddy Kit acknowledges her well-told, funny story about her cat named Tutu.

5 to 6 | Will they like me?

by Ellen Booth Church

As the children come through the kindergarten door, some bound in, while others hang back. All are experiencing their first taste of going to the "big school," with all the accompanying thoughts and feelings related to defining themselves in this new setting.

Facing New Challenges

Traditionally, the beginning of the year is a time to focus on children's developing self-concept. Some 5- and 6-year-olds have participated in groups of other children before, but the world of kindergarten is a much bigger pond to swim in! One of the greatest challenges new kindergarten students face is the development of a strong and positive sense of self in a "big school" setting. It is not unusual for a normally confident child to experience some insecurity. The child may have difficulty separating. He may watch rather than participate, or he may be demanding of attention. The unspoken questions in his behavior might be saying, Who am I in this big group of kids? How do I fit in? How will I get my needs met?

Transitioning from "Me" to "Us"

It is helpful to understand the developmental viewpoint of a 5- or 6-year-old in order to assist him in developing a good sense of self within the new group at school and in the family. They are transitioning out of the egocentric "me" stage, to a stage in which they have a greater understanding of the "me" within the "us." It is not always an easy transition. Children can vacillate between having patience and understanding the needs of the group, to wanting their own needs met-now! Adults must help children see how their needs will be met within an appropriate time frame. One way to do this is to play turn-taking and transition games. These show children that waiting can be a fun activity.

Becoming Communicators

One of the greatest developing skills a kindergartner has is his ability to communicate. Language in kindergartners has grown beyond basic verbal skills, to include the ability to communicate feelings and needs. This is an important part of self-concept. And this is exactly the time to encourage language. Five- and six-year-olds often need to "talk out" their feelings and problems. Be sure to allow the time and space for these discussions, both in small and large groups.

Defining Themselves Within the Group

Children at this stage want to let you know what they need-even if this includes saying no to something that doesn't suit them. At this time of year, don't be surprised if children say no to participating in some group activities. They are using the power of no to help them define themselves within the group, and to take the time to see where they fit in.

Developing Self-Respect

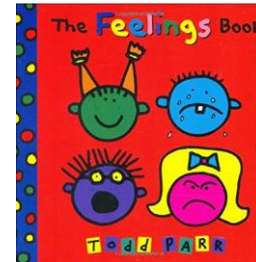
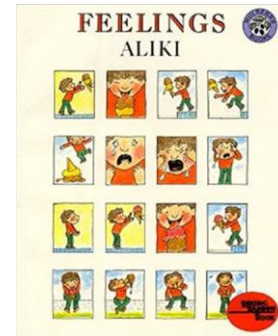
At the core of all these behaviors is the development of self-respect. While self-concept is about "who I am," self-respect is more about "how I take care of myself." A strong sense of self allows children to be able to speak up if they think something is not fair, if they are being ignored, or even if they don't feel well. The key word is respect. As their self-concepts grow to include self-respect, children learn that what is fair for them also has to be fair for those around them. This is when and how a child learns that he is not a lonely fish in the big pool. He sees that he is actually one of many different fish that work together to create a harmoniously flowing sea of friends.

<https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/articles/teaching-content/ages-stages-how-children-develop-self-concept/>

What you can do to help children develop self awareness

Help the children learn new words for feelings

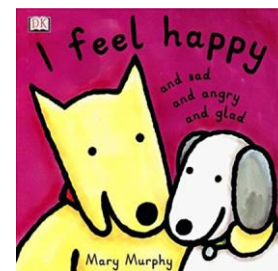
For example, read a book like *Llama Llama Mad at Mama*, by Anna Dewdney, with the children. Use the book to introduce new words like "frustrated," "bored," or "angry" when talking with the children about how the baby llama feels while grocery shopping. Remember to point out how the pictures show feelings you're talking about. This can help the children learn new words for feelings and connect them with expressions and body language. The llama's tantrum also shows that actions are caused by feelings, something you can point out as you read the story.



Don't worry about using words for feelings that the children may not understand

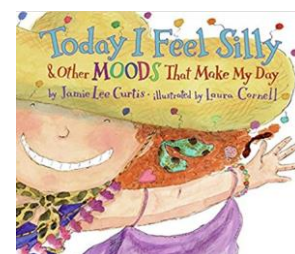
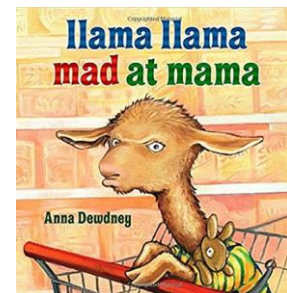
Rutgers Social-Emotional Learning Lab

Director Maurice Elias says that hearing you talk about times you are excited, proud, disappointed or frustrated will help the children learn how to connect feelings with words.



Let the children kids know their feelings are important

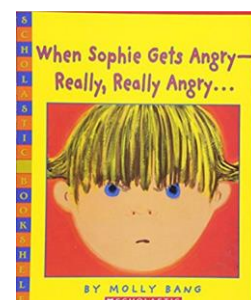
It can be tempting to tell the children to "stop overreacting" or "stop getting upset" when they get frustrated over something that seems small to you -- like struggling with a toy or puzzle. Treating a child's feelings like they're not important can make them feel bad about their emotions or their reactions. Instead, validate their feelings by saying something like, "It can be frustrating when that toy falls apart, can't it? I get frustrated sometimes too. Let's see if we can fix it together." This will help the child learn that their feelings matter and that you're there to help.



Empathize with the child

When you empathize with a child, it will make him feel secure and confident about himself.

- Empathizing with a child will teach him that his emotions are important and are nothing to be ashamed of or hide.





on their behavior, actions, and performance, most often take responsibility to improve.

Reverse negative thinking

Positive words translate into optimism and self-belief. Unfortunately, children's brains are more aware of negative messages. These thoughts interfere with healthy development and give kids a false and negative sense

of themselves.

- The child may have done poorly in something and be feeling bad about it. Empathizing with him will teach him that he does not always have to be perfect, and it is fine.

Let the children communicate freely

The key to a child's self-awareness and overall growth is a good communication that is honest and open.

- Encourage the children to communicate freely with you.
- Let them express their thoughts clearly and without worrying about what you will think.
- Appreciate the fact that they talk to you about what they feel and tell them that you are happy they discuss things with you.
- Even if you do not agree fully with what they say, do not ridicule their opinion. Instead, guide them gently in a positive way.

Teach the children that it's OK to ask for help

Part of self-awareness is knowing your challenges, and asking for help when it's needed is showing self-awareness. Author and education consultant Faye de Muyshondt recommends telling the child, "If you need help, say, 'Help,' and I'll be there to jump in,". Until the child asks, try to stand back. The lesson is in struggling and understanding when to seek assistance.

Give honest feedback

Let go of the myth that giving children critical feedback will harm their confidence and self-esteem. When given constructively, children understand that feedback helps them learn about themselves. Children who are encouraged to reflect

- Savor their positive experiences by reflecting on the things they most enjoyed.
- When children are inspired to speak their gratitude aloud, it becomes even more powerful and transformative.
- By slowing down your speech you will produce calm feelings, particularly with children who may feel anxious or angry. Speaking slowly also deepens people's connections, allowing them to better understand each another.
- Say "yes" whenever possible. If you can't say "yes," reframe your response to invite positive conversation.

Practice mindfulness

The practice of mindfulness is powerful in so many ways. It grows self-awareness, helps us cope with stress, improves concentration, generates empathy, and strengthens the neural systems of the brain! You can help children become mindful warriors by helping them learn the BOLD skills:

- B – Breathing deeply and slowing down.
- O – Observing.
- L – Listening to your values.
- D – Deciding on actions and doing them.

Welcome confusion.

The act of being confused and identifying one's lack of understanding is an important part of developing self-awareness. Take time at the end of a challenging day to ask, "What was most perplexing or puzzling about today?" This not only jump starts metacognitive processing, but also creates a culture that acknowledges *confusion* as an integral part of learning.

Self Awareness blossoms in Montessori environment



<http://montessorimiracles.blogspot.com/2012/08/self-awareness.html>

Another wonderful benefit of the Montessori classroom is that children learn to develop self awareness. Having freedom in the classroom allows children to unfold and develop naturally which helps children learn about themselves.

Each child is unique, individual, and has many facets to them-personality, temperament, likes, dislikes, family values etc. For each child to be gifted the time to learn who they are and how they can contribute to this big world, is wonderful and assists in the development of their self esteem.

Focusing on certain behaviors or certain gifts keeps the focus on a child so narrow that it doesn't allow them to figure out what they are good at. If someone really values being a good piano player and everything is judged against the expectation that everyone should be a good piano player, what is a child to do if they don't like playing the piano or they are not good at playing the piano? Having narrow expectations or standards put on a child truly limits their beauty and potential.

Allowing children to learn about themselves brings about a healthy understanding of themselves as well. They may know that they are really good at 'this' and know they aren't so good at 'that', but knowing that and understanding that doesn't affect

their self esteem-it's a healthy perspective of themselves that shows the world they have a lot to offer and they also have the confidence to improve on something they may not know how to do.

It's amazing that in the classroom, the children figure out who to go to when they need help with certain things. They have such intuition to know who is good at something or who is helpful or who can tie shoes or is really good at puzzles.

Since the environment is set up in such a way and the teachers view children in such a way that children are seen as unique individuals and that they all contribute to the classroom community, then the children see one another as individuals. This perspective in a classroom also cuts down on competition and placing certain behaviors or skills above others.

Every child is a gift and has things to offer the world. Helping children feel successful in who they are and helping them become the best they can be, is what Montessori classrooms are all about. And, because we believe it-the kids show us their uniqueness and beauty everyday!