



## **Raising Self-Confident Children**

Beth and Alice were excited about the big race and had practiced all spring. Both caught their parents' wink of encouragement before the start. After the race Beth walked up to her parents crying, "Third place. I'm such a loser. I'm switching to swimming." Alice couldn't contain her joy. "Practice really paid off. I moved up ten places from last year to fifteenth."

Why do Beth and Alice feel so differently? How will their feelings affect their future?

Alice has a positive self-image. She reacted to last year's race with lots of practice and is happy with her improvement. Beth must come in first place to be happy. She would prefer to quit running than think about ways to improve. How can parents foster self-confidence in children so they can face frustration and set backs and still learn from their mistakes?

**Here are some suggestions for helping your children feel like winners.**

1. Acknowledge your children's special abilities and qualities. Be specific. Tell your children what you like about them. You might say, "The table looks so neat! Your help makes mealtime easier for me. That was very thoughtful of you."
2. Show respect by allowing them to speak for themselves. Try not to add to their story. These interruptions imply they can't explain their activities.
3. Provide opportunities for success. Give children jobs and challenges appropriate for their age and ability. Children can be very proud to set the table or help with dinner. They will feel like a contributing member of the family. Imagine how proud they will feel when they build on this small success -- like helping with dinner to finally making a family dinner from scratch.

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4. Help your children set their own goals. Parents can help by providing choices, but the goals themselves should come from each child. Goals focusing on improvement are more realistic than those that expect perfection. Learning to set short-term goals can lead to success in reaching long-term goals. For example, making the honor roll begins with getting good grades on quizzes, homework and tests.
5. Resist being the "good" parent. The good parent does for children what they can do for themselves. Some parents may want to spare them frustration and disappointment, but overprotection robs children of success and reduces the opportunity to learn from frustration or failure. Children need practice at coping with the stresses of life.
6. Spend time each day with your children. Choose fun activities that you both enjoy. Even brief periods of time together help children develop the feeling they are important and loved. Giving children our complete attention means we are willing to make sacrifices to be with them.
7. Express your affection and appreciation daily. Don't assume your children know you love them. Tell your children, "I love you." Show them warmth and affection.
8. Encourage children to take pride in their successes. Teach children to praise themselves and they will be less likely to depend on others for approval. Set an example by praising yourself. For example, you might say, "My chocolate cake is delicious!" Or say to your child, "I bet you feel good about what you have accomplished." Help your children to distinguish between bragging and self-praise. Bragging compares behavior to others, while praising compares behavior to one's own past performance.

Source: Debby Zigun, Extension Home Economist, Rutgers University Cooperative Extension. **Parent Pages** was developed by Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County.