

Nourish Your Tween's Self-Esteem

Children are not born with a self-image. They develop it over time. They use messages from parents, peers and the media.

Self-esteem is how a person sees herself. What he hears and sees helps him make a value judgment. Hopefully, your tween will look in a mirror and like the person he sees. Kids with a high self-esteem are less likely to follow negative peer groups and engage in risky behavior.



Tweens struggle with their self-esteem. The media focuses on thinness, good looks and trendy clothing and accessories. Tweens look at their growing, maturing bodies and see less than the perfection they see on TV and in magazines. They often connect having the latest fashions, cell phones and iPods with who they are as a person.

A parent's role is to make his tween feel loved and special. They must counteract negative messages with positive ones. Experts say it takes nine positive messages to undo one negative one.

You can nourish your tween's self-esteem. As a parent, you can focus on the positive or dwell on the negative. Your family will follow your lead. Make it positive and loving.

Build Your Child's Self-Esteem

- Avoid the word pretty. Instead, concentrate on her choice of clothes. "That color looks great on you."
- Do not make comments about his personal appearance such as a new pimple or not-so-good-looking hair.
- Feel good about yourself. Your positive attitude and confidence rubs off on your family.
- Never use physical punishment.
- Expect her to do her best. She may not be a starter on the basketball team. It is OK for her to sit on the bench as part of the team.
- Provide daily praise. It is easy to focus on mistakes. Instead, focus on and reinforce good words and actions. Applaud efforts.
- Avoid name calling. Describe the bad behavior. When you state what you see and hear, you force him to **think** about his behavior. Thinking is the first step to better behavior.
- Help her focus on herself as a person. She needs to separate who she is from how she looks.
- Talk about the goodness in everyone. Have him look in a mirror. Ask him what he sees. Tell him what you see.

*Brought to you by Parent Help Line at HSHS St. John's Children's Hospital
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