

Getting ready for school - building confidence

Confidence comes from feelings of well-being and acceptance. It includes self-esteem and a belief in your own ability and skills. This factsheet has been developed to support parents that have children starting school in September, with strategies to build their children's confidence and self-esteem.

Starting school is an exciting milestone in every child's life, however it can present challenges and worries for both parents and children. A child who is rooted from an early age in a strong foundation of confidence and healthy self-esteem will be equipped to face new challenges and experiences. This factsheet offers some ideas, tips and solutions to support you in building children's confidence and minimising some of the worries when your child starts school.

How will these activities support my child?

Building children's emotional well-being, their confidence and self-esteem, will support them to be ready for the transition into school. Confidence and self-esteem go hand in hand. When a child believes they are good at one thing, their self-confidence will grow and this will cascade into other areas of their life. This will act as a passport to a positive outlook. Children will feel more secure, at ease and able to face life's challenges. They will feel more able to interact with other children, to join in and enjoy the routines of the school day.

Taking time to focus on building these attributes will support your child's learning journey through school and beyond. The following ideas will help your child to develop their confidence.

Activities and experiences to support children's confidence

Giving praise and encouragement

Try and say words of encouragement that are specific and relate to the positive characteristics or behaviours that children are displaying. For example, if a child shows good organisational skills by putting their toys away without being asked, give them specific praise so that they understand what it is that they have done. Thank them for tidying their toys away by themselves. Focus on things that your child can control in their own behaviour. For example, if a child has been honest about breaking something, talk together about how you can make it right, but let them know that you are proud of them for telling you what happened.

Becoming resilient

Children who develop resilience despite failures can bounce back after difficulties. Encourage children to understand that setbacks are a normal part of life and can be overcome. Be a positive motivator for your child. Encourage them to keep on trying and remind them of a time when they have persisted to overcome a challenge. For example, this may relate to how they learnt to put their coat on. Remind them how their perseverance resulted in their current success and how they can now do this easily and confidently. If your child is struggling with a new skill, break it down into small steps so that they can experience success in a small part of the task until they do it independently.

Nurturing interests and taking healthy risks

Nurture your child's interests in activities such as painting, drawing, reading, physical activities, sports, singing, baking, being outdoors or anything else that they enjoy. Cultivate these interests and encourage them to learn and deepen their knowledge and skills further. This could be by looking at books together, joining a club, attending weekly activity groups or going on trips to areas of interest. Your child will develop strong confidence as they are able to take part in activities and talk about their new learning in something that they are interested in.

Taking age appropriate risks with an adult can build children's confidence. In tough situations, making choices and taking responsibility for those choices helps children to make sense of the world. Teach children about safety and about stepping away from things if they feel unsafe or something feels too risky. Be mindful of risks that may harm and risks that can be teaching moments. Foster children's curiosity by trying new things and encourage them to make age appropriate choices. This will help them feel more confident.

Fostering independence

Allow children to do things for themselves such as making a sandwich, pouring their own drink or setting the table for dinner. It may be messy and take more time, but developing independence in these small tasks can be greatly rewarding for a child's confidence. Patience is key to helping your child build their self-esteem and grow in confidence. Try and only provide help when they ask for it rather than taking over the activity. Activities that can help prepare children for school include helping them to dress and undress themselves and to put on their own shoes and coats. Allow children to feed themselves using utensils and to go to the toilet and wash their hands independently.

Love and positive actions

One of the most important ways to build children's confidence and self-esteem is by giving them your time, showing unconditional love and giving them an abundance of hugs and smiles. This provides children with a sense of security, safety and support. Make a point of telling them that your love is always there no matter what happens and that you are proud of them.

Supporting personal, social and emotional development: Confidence and self-awareness

Once they have started school they are encouraged to be confident to try new activities, be able to speak in a familiar group and talk about their ideas.

The following tips may help prepare children with this:

- Recognise and enjoy children's success with them and support them to feel good about their own successes (such as rewarding them with hugs and high fives)
- Make lots of time to listen to children as they talk about what they are doing and their experiences with friends and family
- Make a book of their favourite things – you could ask children to draw or take photographs of their favourite things. Talk with them and help them to describe their individual preferences and opinions
- Talk to children about the choices they have made and value their ideas and ways of doing things including times when they solve problems and meet challenges
- Give children the language of emotions to enable them to communicate what they are feeling. Talk to them about how characters in books might be feeling or give them words to describe how they might be feeling. For example, if their tower keeps falling down and they are getting upset, acknowledge their feelings by saying, *"I understand you're feeling frustrated"*
- Look out for opportunities where children can take turns and share with family and friends, so they can begin to show sensitivity to the needs of others.

Further support

- Tiny Happy People <https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people/behaviour-and-wellbeing>
- Supporting children through transition and change online training: <https://moodle.ndna.org.uk/course/view.php?id=200>