

# The gift of self-esteem - how being a parent is like being a gardener

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Self-esteem is what makes a person like themselves, think they are a good human being or feel proud of their abilities. But where does the ability to do this come from? As the first role models for a child parents play a major part, believes Sue Atkins, parenting expert and author (<http://www.positive-parents.com>).

"The job of being a parent is similar to being a gardener - you sow seeds of confidence through nurturing, watering and feeding your growing child's self esteem, and encourage them through the words that you use, the actions that you take and the love and encouragement you give," says Sue Atkins of Positive Parents Confident Kids (<http://www.positive-parents.com>). "The most important gift you can give your child is the gift of self-esteem."

There are some simple ways of nurturing a child's self-esteem. Sue Atkins (<http://www.positive-parents.com>) has some positive parenting tips to help you:

1. Treat your child with respect - your relationship with your child is the foundation of their relationship with others. If you treat your child with compassion, kindness and respect, they will grow up to be concerned about others, caring, considerate and respectful towards others too. So if you are being a respectful role model your child will respect you and learn to respect others and most importantly will learn to love and respect themselves - the key cornerstone in self-esteem, self-belief and self-confidence.
2. Help your child feel special and appreciated - one of the main factors that contributes to your child becoming resilient and confident is by you focusing your energy on your child's strengths and not constantly picking up on their weaknesses. Young children are learning and developing their skills all the time - they need your patience and understanding when they make mistakes and get things wrong, and you will be teaching them that it is OK to make mistakes when learning a new skill.
3. Help your child to develop their problem-solving and decision-making skills - high self-esteem is associated with solid problem-solving skills so encourage your child to "struggle" with their laces for a little bit longer or with doing up their coat buttons or trying to manipulate something. It builds up persistence and tenacity and they learn to develop a wonderful sense of achievement when they have achieved it for themselves. Be guided by your child's age and personality but by developing their independence you give them a great gift.
4. Be an empathetic parent - many well-meaning parents, out of their own frustration, are heard to say such things as: "What's the matter with you, why don't you listen to me?" If your child is having difficulty with something, think of new ways to encourage them. What could you do differently that will support them and let them know you are alongside them? Acknowledge that you understand their emotion, frustration or fear.
5. Highlight your child's strengths - always be on the look-out for ways to praise what your child is good at - helping others, painting pictures, doing jigsaws, kicking balls, being cheerful. Make a list of

what your child is good at and find ways of praising them. For example, if your child is a wonderful artist, display their artwork in the kitchen and change the pictures regularly.

6. Provide choices for your child - providing small choices, such as which colour jumper they wear, really helps your child develop a sense of control over their lives and builds their self confidence. This will also lessen power struggles and tantrums!

7. Have expanding expectations and goals for your child - the development of self-control goes hand-in-glove with self-esteem, and realistic expectations provide your child with a sense of control and can take away undue pressure when they are small. However, don't limit or put a ceiling on what you think your child can achieve as that creates a limiting belief within them as they feel that they can't ever achieve something above your expectations of them. Just be mindful of their age, skills and dexterity and let them explore their own potential.

8. Develop a strong healthy self image in your child - from this solid foundation everything else in life will become easier and more straightforward. Your self-image is the result of the repeated messages and instructions you received as a child from your authority figures, i.e. your parents, family, teachers and other influential adults and peers in your life.

9. Awareness parenting – this is being constantly aware of the bigger picture. It is the nurturing of the unique, happy, confident and well balanced adult that really matters. If you are a thoughtful parent, you are nurturing self-esteem all the time and influencing how your child views themselves for the rest of their lives.

“Everyone is born with their own personality traits but it is not so much who we are when born that counts, but who we are encouraged and allowed to become. On average each person has 90,000 thoughts a day and 60,000 of those are repetitive, so it is important for children to be taught to think positively about themselves,” says Sue Atkins (<http://www.positive-parents.com/about.aspx>).

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Notes to Editors:

1. Sue Atkins' is a parenting coach and her company is Positive Parents Confident Kids ([www.positive-parents.com](http://www.positive-parents.com)). In addition to being a parent coach, Sue is a former Deputy Head with 22 years teaching experience and is an NLP Master Practitioner and Trainer. Positive Parents runs one-to-one coaching sessions, workshops and seminars and works with parents on improving/honing their parenting skills. Sue's favourite phrase is "because kids don't come with a handbook".

2. As well as being a parent coach, Sue is a parent of two teenagers and the author of numerous books,

her latest being "Raising Happy Children for Dummies

(<http://www.positive-parents.com/menus/main.asp?QTopMenu=shop&QSubMenu=Books#>"), one of the famous black and yellow series.

3. For more about Sue's work and to receive her free monthly newsletter of practical tips and helpful advice for bringing up happy, confident, well-balanced children go to her website:

[www.positive-parents.com](http://www.positive-parents.com)

