



# family focus

## II. SELF-ESTEEM GROWS WHEN CHILDREN LIVE WITH REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

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A child's feelings about himself, his *self-esteem*, relate closely to his assessment of how he "measures up" to what people expect. Simply, this is how it works! When expectations are realistic it is easy for a child to experience success and feel personally valuable--feelings which build high self-esteem. On the other hand, when expectations are too high or too rigid, parents often express disappointment in their child's actions. As disappointments mount up they begin to eat away at a child's view of his own value and his self-esteem begins to diminish.

### How Do I Know If My Expectations Are Realistic?

Start by checking your expectations with the basic facts of child development. Learn in a general way what children of a certain age are like and something about their current stage of development. By comparing your expectations with these general facts, try to determine if your goals are generally within reason. Then, recognizing

that no child is "in general" or "average," check to see that you have adjusted your expectations to suit the specific needs, interests and environment of your particular child. Determine if your expectations set appropriate standards of achievement. Ask yourself if they define realistic behavioral limits.

### Roadblocks to Realistic Expectations

Consciously or unconsciously most parents view their children through a series of filters which are the result of their past experiences, personal wishes, or cultural values. These filters often act as roadblocks to a clear view of appropriate expectations for our children. Check yourself on a few of these more common filters.

Inexperience	Often causes parents to expect too much of children. Frequently a problem with the first child.
Hang-over wishes	Expectations for a child are based on parents' wishes and values left over from their childhood, rather than on the child's wants and needs.
Current hungers	Parents may treat children in a manner designed to fulfill their own wishes. For example, children may be pushed to high academic performance or school leadership to add status to parents' position.
Borrowed standards	Often because it is easiest and most natural, parents place the same expectations on their children as they experienced when young; giving little or no thought to today's living or the particular child.

### Chart the Results of Your Expectations for Your Child. Evaluate Their Impact!

....for example:

Expectation	Result	Evaluation
Toddler expected not to touch knick-knacks in the house.	Child often has hands slapped, accompanied by "NO! NO!"	Action may destroy a child's curiosity which is his main motivation for learning at this age. It is desirable to provide an environment in which he is free to explore and research! The expectation is based on parental wishes, not on child's needs.
Preschooler expected to be honest at all times.	Child frequently isolated in room or denied privileges as punishment.	This concept is often hard for a child to understand because a sense of morality or conscience does not begin to develop until about 6 years old. Child may begin to feel that he is no good in the eyes of his parents. Any comments made should be directed to the behavior, not at the child. For example: "It's important to tell me exactly what happened." <u>NOT</u> "No one likes children who lie."

#### Run a Check on Your Current Expectations

One by one evaluate the expectations you have for your children by asking yourself these questions.



Next, check your expectations for fairness. Weed out the ones that have no meaning for your child at his stage of development. Evaluate the expectations against the list of filters described above, being careful not to camouflage a desire in yourself as a need in your child. Revise your expectations as needed. Re-evaluate often.

- Why do I have this expectation?
- Where did it come from?
- Is it based on my wishes or my child's needs?
- Does it realistically fit this particular child...at this age...with his temperament and background?
- What purpose does it serve?

#### References and Recommended Readings (\*paperback editions)

- Briggs, Dorothy Corkille, Your Child's Self Esteem, Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1970.\*
- Brazelton, T. Berry, Toddlers and Parents, New York, New York: Delacorte Press, 1974.
- Elkind, David, A Sympathetic Understanding of the Child: Birth to Sixteen, Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1971.\*
- Parents' Magazine and Better Homemaking: published monthly by Parents' Magazine Enterprises, Inc., Bergenfield, New Jersey.
- Satir, Virginia, Peoplemaking, Palo Alto, California: Science and Behavior Books, Inc., 1972.\*