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SELF-ESTEEM

It Grows When Children Live With Realistic Expectations

A child's feelings about himself or herself—self-esteem—relate closely to his/her assessment of how he/she measures up to what people expect. When expectations are realistic, it is easy for a child to experience success and feel personally valuable. These are 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/her own value and his/her 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, you can determine if your goals are generally within reason. Then, recognizing that each child is unique, check to see that you have adjusted your expectations to suit the specific needs, interests and environment of your 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 according to their own past experiences, personal wishes, or cultural values. These perceptions often act as roadblocks to developing appropriate expectations for our children. Check yourself on a few of these more common roadblocks.

Inexperience

Lack of experience often causes parents to expect too much from a child. This is frequently a problem with the first child.

Left 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 increase parents' status.

Borrowed standards

Because it is easiest and most natural, parents often place the same expectations on their children that they experienced when young, giving little or no thought to today's living or the particular child.

Run a Check on Your Current Expectations

Evaluate the expectations you have for your children by asking yourself these questions:

- 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/her temperament and background?
- What purpose does it serve?

Next, check your expectations for fairness. Leave out the ones that have no meaning for your child at his/her stage of development. Evaluate the expectations against the list 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.

References and Recommended Readings (paperback editions)

Briggs, Dorothy Corkille, *Your Child's Self-Esteem*, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1970.

Brazelton, T. Berry, *Toddlers and Parents*, New York, N.Y.: Delacorte Press, 1974.

Elkind, David, *A Sympathetic Understanding of the Child: Birth to Sixteen*, Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1971.

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Satir, Virginia, *Peoplemaking*, Palo Alto, CA: Science and Behavior Books, Inc., 1972.

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

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/her main motivation for learning at this age. It is desirable to provide an environment in which he/she is free to explore and research! The expectation is based on parental wishes, not on child's needs. (Put knick-knacks away for awhile.)
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 age 6. Child may begin to feel that he/she is no good in the eyes of his/her parents. Any comments made should be directed at the behavior, not at the child. For example: "It's important to tell me exactly what happened." NOT "No one likes children who lie."



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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work in agriculture and home economics, acts of May 8, and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, W.J. Moline, Director, Cooperative Extension Service, Michigan State University, E. Lansing, MI 48824.

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