

PROMOTING RESILIENCE IN OUR CHILDREN

CONFIDENT PARENTS, CONFIDENT CHILDREN

What do children need from parents?

Some writers think that we have lots to learn about how children grow and develop, but we think there are a set of basic needs which, if parents try to meet these, will be “good enough”.

Children’s needs are as follows:

1. **Basic physical care** - including;
 - Warmth, adequate food and rest
 - Being kept clean and looked after
 - Being protected from danger

2. **Affection** - including;
 - Physical contact like holding, stroking, cuddling and kissing, comforting
 - Admiring our children, being delighted in them, tenderness
 - Patience
 - Having the time for our children
 - Making allowances for annoying behaviour
 - Generally approving of our children, being friends with them and having time for a chat

3. **Safety and security** - which involves;
 - The same person looking after a child – not a lot of changes
 - Living in the same family unit
 - Being able to tell what will happen next in the family
 - Having routines that are mostly the same
 - The family has simple rules and regular controls
 - A reasonably happy family life

4. **Helping children to grow to their in-built potential**
 - Encouraging curiosity and exploring behaviour
 - Developing children’s skills by parents being happy to answer questions and joining in the children’s play
 - Making sure the child uses all the education opportunities

5. **Guiding and controlling the child**
 - Parents need to teach their children how to behave. This includes discipline which is suited to the child’s age. It also means parents need to be patient and it also means we parents also need to be a role model for the child to copy, for instance, in honesty and in showing concern and kindness for others.

6. **Teaching the child to become responsible**
 - Children need to be able to do small things for themselves at first, like washing their faces, tidying toys etc., and then be able to do more for themselves. Children need to be able to learn from their mistakes as well as their successes. They also need praise and encouragement to help them want to do better.

7. Children need to gradually become independent

- All of our children will eventually want to leave home ready and able to cope with “the big bad world”. Teaching our children responsibility is one part of this. Parents need to find a good balance between protection and over-protection.

Some people have tried to work out what positive and negative qualities in parents might be important for children. Basically, children need the good qualities.

Positive qualities	Negative qualities
Being warm and affectionate	Being cold and hostile
Being able to set clear limits to what a child can or can't do	Not keeping to the same rules all the time
Quick to realise when the child has needs for help	Doesn't notice when a child needs help
Accept a child's faults so that the child does not need to be perfectly behaved all the time	Basically does not accept the child – is rejecting
The parent is predictable and consistent so that the child knows where he/she stands all the time	Unpredictable so that the child is not sure what the rule is today because the rules change with the parent's moods
Respects the individual child	Is not respectful
Recognises the good qualities in the child	Makes a big deal of the bad qualities of the child – basically critical

Other people think there are “building blocks” of parenting. These are:

- How we grow to love our children. What makes the special relationship we call bonding and what makes children feel attached to their parents. For parents, this will mean loving our children because they are special to us. How well we can see the world through other people's eyes so that we can begin to understand what might be going on, for instance, if our child is upset. Also, if we can see other people as equals.
- If we are going to be able to understand others, it is obvious we will need to be able to understand ourselves and our own needs.
- Being able to be gentle, calm and to be able to show our care for our children through touch, which makes the child feel a sense of trust, kindness and security.
- Being able to set clear limits for our children – that is, feel OK about discipline.
- Loving our children unconditionally. Being honest with them and giving them respect. This can go on no matter how the child is behaving. This does not mean being soft, by the way.
- Parents need a bit of knowledge about how children grow and what they need at different ages.
- Finally, children need a sense of their own identity and history – who they are and where they came from – what has happened to them and why.

[Taken from the book “Confident Parents, Confident Children” by Smith, Pugh and De’Ath, 1994]

BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM IN YOUR CHILD

What is self-esteem?

It is to do with respect for yourself and others. One group of writers defines it as *“appreciating my own worth and importance and having the character to be accountable for myself and act responsibly towards others”*.

It is also about attitudes to trying things to do – “I can do that!” – so it is about confidence. It is also about the confidence to ask for help or to say “I don’t understand, can you help?”

How do we get self-esteem?

This seems to be feeling accepted by others, our parents especially, our teachers and relatives. We feel cared for and loved and listened to.

It is also about being able to try things out for ourselves – achievements – and it is about learning to make all sorts of choices and decisions for ourselves.

All this can lead us to feeling we have an “island of competence” - a range of things we feel we can do and feel competent about – and this can affect how we tackle new things to do.

What about low self-esteem?

If we are feeling low self-esteem, it is likely we will give up easily if what we are trying does not work. We might avoid doing things we think we might not be good at, or put it off. We might make excuses for not doing something or deny doing it or that we haven’t done it. We might cheat, or act the fool or become aggressive – anything, in fact, to get out of doing something we think we will fail at. All this is, of course, self-defeating. For some children it can be a way of life and can feel like they are drowning in “an ocean of inadequacy”.

What can we parents do?

1. We can encourage our children to take some responsibility for their lives.

This means we need to get our children’s ideas on how they could help and give them a chance to do something. For example, one wee boy disliked school and writing. The one thing he liked was looking after his dog. He was encouraged to look after the pets at school and to write a paper about looking after pets. He wrote this because he believed he had something important to say. His “book” was put in the library and he gave talks on pet care to all the classes. Once a child can do one thing, it may be important to give them other responsibilities.

2. We can help our children make decisions for themselves.

Our children need to learn about making sensible choices, making decisions and develop their problem-solving skills. For example;

- Giving our children choices, e.g. which jersey to wear, what to have for breakfast (cornflakes or rice crispies etc.) would be a start
- Helping to choose what meals to have in the week and, later, helping to prepare them

- Negotiating rules, e.g. for bedtime

All this increases our children's sense of being in control of their own lives and their confidence in themselves. It involves us listening, although we don't have to agree all the time.

3. Encouragement.

As parents we often only hear from schools if there is something wrong. This is very discouraging for us. If, instead, we make a big fuss about the good things and minimise the bad things, it is likely our children will want more of the praise and therefore do more good things.

For instance, one wee boy was very pleased to get a note from his teacher about a good piece of work at school. Giving his son some "special time" in the day helped a father and his son get on better and this helped a lot with the boy's behaviour. Up until then the father had been irritated by the bad behaviour and ignored the good behaviour.

4. Developing self-discipline in our children.

This is about helping our children think about what they are doing and why. They need to think about the effects of their behaviour on others and change their behaviour if necessary. It is about helping our children to "think before they act" and this in turn helps them become more responsible as they get older.

So, making rules and sticking to them is OK. It helps if you stick to them consistently and that the reasons for the rules are explained to them. As they get older, children can help work out the rules.

5. Dealing with mistakes and failure.

If we are honest, we all make mistakes. In fact, making mistakes helps us learn just as much as having successes, so we need to get over to our children that it is fine to make mistakes and not to get cross or start calling our children things like "naughty, clumsy, stupid, silly" – these are like labels that stick for a long time. For instance, if our child gets 10 out of 20, we could emphasise that they got 10 right rather than 10 wrong.

6. Belief in our children

If we believe in our children they will also start to believe in themselves that they can do things. Sometimes it isn't just us parents who can help but a teacher, an aunt or uncle or a friend of the family. If your child needs to build up self-esteem these things have been shown to work well. You may not see immediate results but, if you keep going, you will start to see results.

Have a go! Good luck!