

# BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM

## *in Young Children*

By Carley Flam Decker, Ph.D.

What is self-esteem, and why is it so important? When most parents of young children talk about positive self-esteem, they are referring to the need for children to have positive feelings about themselves. Self-esteem in little ones ultimately refers to the extent to which they feel valued and accepted by the important adults and peers in their lives.

The foundation for self-esteem is laid very early in life when infants form their first connections to their caregivers. When adults respond to babies' smiles and cries, babies learn to feel loved and important. They also learn that they can trust their parents and others who take care of them to meet their most basic needs. This teaches little ones that the world is a safe place to explore and learn.

Children also build self-esteem by engaging in everyday situations such as accomplishing a new milestone. For instance, when a child is learning to crawl, she may try and fail several times before she finally succeeds. It is in the trying that the child develops a sense of her own capabilities, as well as through the interactions she has with and the supportive feedback she receives from her parents. Positive self-esteem prepares children to be able to manage many of life's challenges. Studies consistently demonstrate that children who feel good about themselves are better able to handle conflicts and resist negative influences. They are also happier, more realistic and more optimistic about life.

What can you do to build your child's self-esteem? Here are some ideas that can help you foster positive self-esteem in your little one:

\*Choose your words carefully. Children are very sensitive to criticism so when you praise them be sure to be honest and

appreciate their effort rather than the end result. Try not to use harsh tones or judgmental words.

\*Be a good role model. If you are too hard on yourself, your little one will likely pick up on your pessimism and unrealistic expectations of yourself and may identify with you; so nurture your own self-esteem.

\*Focus on the positive aspects of your child's behaviors. Even when your child is engaging in a behavior that you don't like, find something positive to focus on.

\*Be affectionate with your little ones. Love them up! Affection and love are incredibly important self-esteem builders so hug, kiss and cuddle them! Tell them you love them spontaneously several times a day!

\*Expose your little one to lots of different activities such as Mommy & Me classes, music classes and outdoor activities. Your child will feel good about learning new skills. She will learn what activities she likes and doesn't like and also what activities she is good at and not so good at. Remember, your goal here is just to expose your child to fun activities and enjoy them with her. Don't put pressure on your child based on your expectations. Let her explore and learn what she enjoys and doesn't enjoy for herself!

\*Be sure to create a safe and healthy home environment for your children free from exposure to excessive marital conflict and abuse. Children raised in homes where they do not feel safe suffer from extremely poor self-esteem.

Article courtesy of My Gym Fitness Centers, [www.my-gym.com](http://www.my-gym.com).