**Steps to Positive Self Esteem**

**Step 1: Communicate with clarity and positivity**

Setting realistic, clear objectives and goals lead to accountability. Be clear and ensure you both understand and agree on the objectives. If needed, spell it out step-by-step. This is part of teaching children what you want them to do, rather than reprimanding them for doing it wrong. Outline specifically what needs to be done, write it down or make a check list.

Make sure that you provide positive acknowledgement and appreciation for a job well done. Recognise the good and expand on it to promote more positive responses and positive outcomes. Positive reinforcement builds confidence for a child who is doing well. If we only get attention or reinforcement for negative behaviours or actions, then we learn to behave negatively in order to receive some type of attention. This is called negative reinforcement or negative attention seeking. To counter this, it is especially important to remain aware that the child is making efforts and doing what is asked of them. It is the parent’s and / or educator’s responsibility to implement positive reinforcement for positive behaviours.

**Step 2: Everyone on the same page**

Clear rules and expectations should be agreed upon by all adults, including grandparents, educators and babysitters.

Promoting inconsistency can lead to issues such as manipulation, insecurity and stress while decreasing accountability, confidence, and responsible behaviours. One of the most important aspects in working with children is effective, consistent communication within the family and with teachers. It is really important for parents and children work together to maintain consistency in helping a child learn and grow both emotionally and educationally.

**Step 3: Provide consistency and accountability**

To feel successful and confident, we must be willing to be accountable for our choices and actions. If you make it clear that homework will be checked when you return from work, check the homework and be consistent. Hold up your end of the bargain and help them to understand the importance of accountability and priorities. You cannot expect your child to do their part if you are not accountable for what you say and do. Children learn through watching, so if we don’t do as we say, the result is a mixed message.

Be definitive in what you say; communicate clearly and in advance whenever possible. Anytime we can be proactive in getting something completed ahead of time, the better off we are. This stops the negative habit of procrastination which injects more stress upon us.

**Step 4: Allow them to experience the natural consequences that arise from their choices**

You must be willing to let them fail and understand the consequences that comes from that failure. This requires that your self esteem can withstand any criticism or negative feedback from teachers, family, friends and others. It is a time when you become aware that you have limited control over another person, even your child.

In life, we all must experience negative feedback. We will make poor choices, and we need to held accountable for our actions. We all experience failure, and we need to learn how to overcome obstacles and understand how we can learn from them, rather than allowing them to define us. This is how we grow and learn.

With some luck, children will only need to fail once or a few times before they understand the lesson at hand. Your child will begin to understand that it is their responsibility to do what is required for school, and that you will not protect them from the consequences of their actions and choices.

Try to stand firm and continue to remain consistent and positive, along with everyone communicating effectively.

**Step 5: Learning from our failures and shortcomings**

Failing is most helpful when we learn something from it, and often, it can be our greatest teacher. We must all learn to live with our decisions and actions, or inaction. Failure can help us to grow to improve and to continue to move forward if we are willing to recognise what we are to learn from this experience, and what we can do to improve and make a better choice next time. Events or experiences happen every day and ultimately, our response to those events will determine the outcome.

This is an excellent time to teach and process with the child. Ask them what they learned from the experience and what they can do to make it better next time. However, avoid asking this when the tension is still high and they are in a heightened state. It is important to teach children that sometimes we all make the wrong choice and sometimes we make them more than once. At some point, we realise that if we continue to make the same choice, we are choosing the consequences that go with it. To start a conversation, you could ask a question such as, “Are you ready to talk about what happened today and what you can do differently next time?” If not, don’t push it and let them know that you are there when they are ready to talk about it.

Effective processing with the child:

* Encourage the child to identify improved choices should a similar event arise.
* Facilitate a potential scenario and help him or her process different choices along with the potential outcomes for those choices.

This facilitation process helps the child understand that when faced with certain events, he or she can learn to process potential outcomes prior to the choice being made. This encourages the ability to think before acting and encourages coping, problem solving and decision making skills.

**Step 6: Encourage good behaviour and avoid reinforcing bad behaviour**

Catch them being good is a phrase that cannot be overstated. When your children perform actions you want to see more of, thank them and show appreciation for what they are doing. Tell them you appreciate them and be descriptive about what you appreciate: “I appreciate it when you complete your homework / do your chores early, and we relax, or play a game or do watch a film together”.

Reinforce their efforts even when they don’t get things right: “I know that you tried your best on your spelling test. Maybe we can practice the words that you found tricky together?”

Let them know that asking for help is not a sign of weakness or failure. However, be cautious not to lower your expectations in the process. If things are done early / without lots of prompts from you, praise and reinforce going beyond the minimum.

Home environments filled with consistency and positive reinforcement often result in children exhibiting healthy skills and positive choices. Children who live in a negative environment and experience anger, stress, abuse and inconsistency are more likely to act out to obtain negative attention. If children live in negative environments, to obtain some type of attention to feel noticed, they can feel they need to act out.

Children who have a positive support system and consistency from one or more caring adults are more inclined to overcome traumatic events more easily.

In addition, we all need to feel that we matter and everyone appreciates positive reinforcement from others. Children want to be loved, appreciated and accepted. They want praise, attention, recognition and rewards for their efforts and actions. When they are recognised or validated for their efforts, their self esteem increases and encourages them to want to do more.

**Step 7: Provide opportunities for your child to succeed**

Allow children to make choices from an early age, within reason: “You need to put a coat on for school. Do you want to wear the red one or green one?” You have given them a choice, but have not given them the option to not wear a coat.

As children become older, the choices become riskier, but that is part of the developmental cycle. Those who begin making decisions at an early age will develop more confidence, and therefore, will be more likely to make improved choices later.

**Step 8: Love them anyway**

Learn to detach from the outcome. Do what you can to uphold your responsibility to your children and accept that you cannot control the situation. We all make errors in judgement, but again, we all can learn from it rather than to remain in it. We must keep moving forward to learn and to grow. If not, we’ll repeat same cycle and receive the same or similar outcomes.

As adults, we don’t appreciate it when we are reminded about our past mistakes. It’s difficult to move forward if we keep looking back. Keep that thought in mind as you continue to teach and encourage your child/ren.

Separate the behaviour from the child: “I might not like what you did, or the choice you made, but I love you”.

**Step 9: Understand and implement positive affirmations and self talk**

To ‘affirm’ means to validate and confirm. Affirmations are a great way to improve and grow self esteem whether for yourself or your child. Affirmations are powerful and begin with two especially important words: I am. What you choose to place after those words creates your reality.

By integrating affirmations into our thoughts and words, we can make positive changes and improve our confidence. Begin positive self-talk with words such as: *I am, I can, and I will.* For example, I am happy; I am kind; I can do this. Using positive, descriptive words and saying them numerous times a day can change thoughts into self belief and confidence.

*I can* and *I will* are specific action steps. Use them as a goal by adding a specified time frame along with what you are going to do to achieve your goal. Once the goal has been achieved, be sure to provide positive reinforcement or a special celebratory event.

**Step 10: Implement the emotional guidance system**

Emotions help guide us toward or away from certain situations. They help us to understand, connect, and improve communication with others, along with connecting with our inner true selves. They also alert us when something is wrong or potentially dangerous, and they help influence our choices and decisions.

As adults, we ask ‘how are you?’ and may hear responses such as ‘good’ or ‘fine’. These are not emotions. With social media, we use emojis of happy, sad, surprised and angry. We give a like, love, sad, angry, all with one click of a button. We may leave no comment. As a society, we do not always take the time to see how someone really does feel, nor do we take the time to inventory our own feelings. Our questions and responses have become automatic with no real thought as to how we truly feel. If we are unconscious or unable to process how we feel, how can we expect our children to be more conscious of their feelings?

It is therefore important that we teach children to identify and understand their different emotions, but to also to express them appropriately. This is called emotional literacy and allows children to externalise their internal feelings and therefore, process them in a positive way rather than by behaviours such as hitting things / people, or having a tantrum.