

# Raising Confident, Competent Children

**T**he values, skills and behaviours to encourage in children are the choice of every individual parent. However, some core skills are important for everyone. Children are more likely to be confident, succeed at school and get along with others when they develop certain life skills. These life skills include being respectful and considerate, communicating well with others, thinking positively and having healthy self-esteem, being a good problem solver, and becoming independent and able to do things for themselves. This tip sheet gives some ideas on how to help children learn these important life skills and become confident and competent individuals.

- Avoid distractions like watching television or using the computer. These activities may make it harder to leave the house on time.
- Discuss the morning ground rules.
- Explain to your child what you would like them to do each morning.
- Start an activity schedule. This can be a chart with photographs, drawings or words for each step your child must complete; for example, wake up, get out of bed, get dressed, have breakfast, clean your teeth, and pack your lunch in your schoolbag. Pictures can be arranged in the order they are to be completed.
- Prompt your child to use their schedule — *What's the first thing you need to do?*
- Initially, praise your child for each step they complete, even if they needed to be prompted. Once your child can do the step by themselves, only praise them if they do it without a reminder.
- Provide a back-up reward, such as an after school activity they enjoy.
- Once the routine is established, gradually reduce prompts and rewards.

## ▶ Avoid Morning Traps

A number of parenting traps make it harder for children to get into a good morning routine. These include parents getting up late themselves so there is a big rush for everyone. Being disorganised in the morning, such as not being able to find school clothes, also contributes to stress before school and can cause children to get bored or distracted and stop getting ready.

Another trap is simply taking over and doing everything for your child. Children learn when they have opportunities to practise their skills. Also, if parents give too many prompts and reminders to get their child to hurry up, children can learn to rely on this and only get ready after repeated reminders.

## ▶ Get Your Child Into a Good Morning and Afternoon Routine

Getting children into a good morning routine helps to start the day off well.

- Plan ahead. Before retiring the night before, be clear about the commitments and activities for the next day.
- Be organised and get everything ready the night before. Have your child's school clothes ready so they are easy to find in the morning.

**FOR FURTHER HELP** If you have any questions or have tried these strategies and are concerned about your child's progress, contact the service where you were given this tip sheet or contact:

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learning. Developing problem-solving skills can help both academic learning and social development.

## ▶ Set a Good Example

Children learn a lot about problem solving through watching. Let your child see how you deal with problems. Talk about how you can break a problem down into smaller parts that can be worked out one at a time.

## ▶ Teach Your Child Problem Solving Steps

Rather than solving all problems as a parent, encourage your child to work at solving their own problems. Congratulate them when they solve a problem on their own.

You can teach your child the steps in problem solving:

- State the problem clearly.
- Come up with some possible solutions.
- Think about the good points and bad points of the possible solutions.
- Decide on the best solution or plan.
- Try it out by putting the plan into action.
- Review how the solution worked and make any necessary changes.

## BECOMING INDEPENDENT

As children develop, they can do many more things for themselves, without their parents' help. This can be upsetting for parents, who may feel their child does not need them any more. In reality, children continue to need their parents to provide guidance as they master more complex skills.

As children become more independent, their confidence also develops. This gradual increase in independence prepares children for later life. It also enables children to participate and contribute to the smooth running of the home.

Becoming independent involves learning basic self-care, increasing responsibilities, and feeling confident in their abilities.

Behaviours that show increasing independence include:

- Getting ready to go out.
- Completing simple household chores.
- Self-care skills such as using the toilet, brushing their hair, cleaning their teeth, dressing.
- Looking after their own things and tidying up after themselves.
- Getting ready for school.
- Cooking under supervision.

## ▶ Encourage Your Child To Cooperate and Follow Rules

All children need guidance about what is expected of them, such as at school or at friends' homes. Children feel safe and secure when they know an adult is in control. To be cooperative, children need to be able to:

- Stop what they are doing.
- Listen and pay attention to what is being said so that they understand what they are expected to do.
- Follow an instruction straight away, without complaining.
- Join in class or group activities.
- Cooperate with other children by sharing, taking turns and observing the rules of the game or activity.

Parents can help children learn these skills at home. It is best to be firm and calm without getting angry or raising your voice when you want your child to do something. Follow these steps:

- Get close (within an arm's length).
- Use your child's name — *Emilio*.
- Give the instruction clearly in a calm, firm voice — *Your game is over. It's time to turn off the computer. Shut it down please.*
- Pause briefly (5 seconds) without saying anything else.
- Praise your child if they do as you ask straight away — *Thank you for turning off the computer when I asked.*
- Repeat the instruction once if your child ignores the request, or protests — *I have asked you to do something. Shut down the computer now please.*
- If your child does not do as you ask, use a suitable back-up consequence (e.g. less computer time later), quiet time, or

## ▶ Encourage Politeness

When children are polite, they are more likely to be listened to and have their needs met. To encourage children to be friendly and polite away from home, it helps when parents speak to children and other adults in a polite, respectful manner. This means using a pleasant tone of voice and

appropriate language, such as not swearing. Prompt or remind your child to ask properly for things they want. When children ask politely, without having to be reminded first, thank them and praise them for using a pleasant voice — *Jodie, thank you for asking so politely for my help. I like it when you ask nicely.*

Do not give your child what they ask for if they whine, demand or use an unpleasant voice. This will only teach them that they do not need to be polite. Be as consistent as you can. Of course, there are times when this rule can be relaxed a little, such as when children are very tired or sick.



## BUILDING BLOCKS FOR SUCCESS

There are six building blocks for becoming confident and competent:

- Showing respect to others.
- Being considerate.
- Having good communication and social skills.
- Having healthy self-esteem.
- Becoming a good problem solver.
- Becoming independent.

These skills can be encouraged as children develop.

## SHOWING RESPECT TO OTHERS

Children are more likely get along with their parents, peers, teachers and others when they learn to be respectful towards them. Children can show respect in many ways.

It is important for children to learn to be polite. This includes speaking in a pleasant voice when making requests, answering questions, or saying what they want to say. In many cultures it also involves addressing adults using appropriate names or titles such as Mr or Mrs.

Cooperating and following rules are also part of showing respect. This relates to cooperating with parents' and teachers' requests and instructions, and following family, school and classroom rules.



time-out for problem behaviour — *I have now asked you twice and you are still not cooperating. Now you need to go to quiet time for 5 minutes.*

Over time your child may start to cooperate with less clear instructions. Remember, it is always important to make sure your child knows what you want them to do.

## BEING CONSIDERATE

Children find it easier to make friends and get on with others when they are considerate of others' needs. This can involve skills such as:

- Looking at and listening when someone is speaking to them, such as a friend telling a story.
- Taking turns in games and activities.
- Asking what others might like to do rather than assuming that other children will always want to follow.
- Waiting and not interrupting while a parent or teacher is busy or speaking to someone, such as on the telephone.
- Thinking about other people's feelings.
- Helping others.
- Being friendly, such as welcoming a new child in the class.
- Doing simple chores without having to be asked, like putting dirty clothes in a clothes basket.

## Model Being Considerate

Encourage your child to be considerate to others by modelling these skills yourself.

## Avoid Being Critical of Others

When children hear their parents being very critical, or making sarcastic or negative comments about others, they can learn that it is okay to make hurtful comments. Avoid being critical and negative.

## Point Out Others' Good Points

In daily conversations, point out other people's good points and achievements so that your child gets used to seeing good in others. For example, when someone shows an act of kindness or does something community-minded, point it out during family conversations — *Mr. Lim down the road is such a kind person. He was helping Mrs. Ambrose with her car this morning, even though he was on his way to work.*

## Provide Opportunities To Show Caring

Providing children with opportunities to show caring can involve letting them help others or take responsibility for a task like

feeding a pet. Many children love to be involved in helping in this way.

## Acknowledge Kindness

Praise or thank your child when they try to be helpful or show an awareness of other people's feelings. For example, if you are feeling unwell and your child brings you something to eat or drink, acknowledge their effort and thank them for their kindness — *Radhika, that is very kind of you to bring me the juice. Thank you so much.*

Tell your child how their kindness makes you feel — *I feel very special when you think of me.* When children hear how happy others feel when shown an act of kindness, they learn that being considerate and helpful can help them build relationships with others. This can also help them to feel good about themselves.

## Ask Your Child How Events Affect Them or Another Person

To encourage children to consider the feelings of others and the impact of both pleasant and unpleasant events on themselves and others, ask children to express their views — *I wonder how Damian's feeling right now. How do you think you would feel if that happened to you?*

## Encourage Your Child To Make Amends

Children learn through the consequences of their actions. When a child does something that deliberately hurts someone, describe what they have done wrong and get them to apologise or make amends — *Tanya, I want to talk to you about what happened then. When you told Abby to go away, she looked very upset. I want you to say sorry and let her join the game.*

## Provide Back-up Consequences for Inconsiderate or Hurtful Behaviour

If the problem occurs again on the same day, back up with either a logical consequence (e.g. remove the game), quiet time or time-out.

## HAVING GOOD COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL SKILLS

Children who have good social skills find it easier to make and keep friends. They are liked by their peers and generally get along with others. They also tend to have fewer arguments and disagreements.

## Help Your Child Make Friends

Many parents feel there is little they can do to influence who their children choose as friends. However, parents have an important

role in monitoring and encouraging children's friendships. Here are some tips:

- Show an interest in your child's friends and their families. This is good for your child and it allows you to meet and get to know other parents.
- Talk about what it means to be a friend and how to make new friends. This may come up in casual conversation or be triggered by an event at school, such as a child being hurt or left out.
- Suggest to your child that they invite another child to visit your home. If your child is reluctant to ask, be prepared to contact the parents to invite their child over to play.
- Expect appropriate behaviour from your child when they have a friend over. If there was a problem last time, discuss some rules. Talk about what will happen if your child follows or breaks the rules. Ask your child to state the rules as a reminder — *So what do you have to remember today when Heather comes over to play?*
- Expect appropriate behaviour from other children when they are a guest in your home. For example, if a visitor is rude or demanding, and you expect good manners from your own child, be prepared to remind the visitor of your house rules. Ask them to try again using a pleasant voice.
- If the visitor upsets or hurts your child, separate the children for a short time. Try to speak to the visitor's parent about the problem and what should be done to prevent it in the future.

## What To Do if Your Child Hurts Others

Aggression and teasing are common problems in school-aged children. Many children who hurt or tease others at school show similar behaviour at home towards siblings. When children hurt others, it needs to be taken seriously. If you find out about it, try to work out why it is happening and develop a plan to deal with the problem.

If another parent or the school has reported that your child has hurt another child, consider the following steps:

- Listen carefully to what your child is said to have done.
- Discuss the problem with your child. Let your child know how you found out and describe exactly what you were told. Ask your child to tell you what happened.
- Listen to your child's explanation.
- Let your child know that hurting others is a serious problem and it must stop. Do

not accept explanations that minimise the problem, such as saying they were only having fun.

- Help your child become aware of the impact of their behaviour on others — *How do you think you would feel if someone did that to you?*
- Explain the consequences of hurting others. Point out that aggression is not tolerated at school and that your child could get into serious trouble if it happens again.
- Watch how your child interacts with other children. What specifically does your child do that annoys or upsets them (e.g. name calling, using threatening words or gestures, hitting, hurting, deliberately leaving out another child, making up stories about another child, or telling tales).
- To encourage playing nicely, praise your child and give them positive attention for playing well with others.
- If you see your child hurt another child, act quickly. Tell your child what they have done wrong and what they should have done instead. Provide an immediate back-up consequence such as time-out or loss of a privilege.

If the problem is serious or longstanding, work with your child's school and find out how they would like to deal with the situation. Many schools have anti-bullying strategies. The best approach is usually a collaborative one in which staff, students and parents are made aware that bullying is a concern in the school. The most effective programs involve increased supervision of students, teaching coping strategies to children who are bullied, and teaching strategies to children who are bullying about how to solve problems without being aggressive.

Another approach is to use a home-school contract where teachers note episodes of aggression on a chart that is sent home daily with the child. This can be a simple system that rewards children with privileges at home for behaving well at school, and provides a penalty if bullying occurs.

## HAVING HEALTHY SELF-ESTEEM

Self-esteem refers to a person's view of themselves. Children with healthy self-esteem are likely to be happy, cooperative, successful, and make friends easily.

Positive self-esteem is related to children thinking and believing good things about themselves. Children are more likely to do this when they receive lots of praise, affection and attention from parents, and

have their achievements recognised. Positive self-esteem is also related to having clear limits and appropriate discipline.

- Low self-esteem can be related to:
  - Parents making unfavourable comparisons with siblings.
  - Lack of self-care and hygiene.
  - Lack of physical activity.
  - Poor body image.
  - Negative and pessimistic thinking.
- Frequent arguments and conflict between parents.
- Neglect or abuse.

The following strategies can be used to encourage children to develop healthy self-esteem.

- ▶ **Create a Safe, Predictable World**  
Children feel more secure when their lives are predictable and do not change too much from one day to the next. Try to have daily routines and let your child know about any upcoming special events or changes to their routine.

- ▶ **Encourage an Active Lifestyle**  
Encourage lots of outdoor play involving burning up energy. Spend time with your child in activities that keep them active and healthy, such as running, jumping, chasing, hopping and skipping. Find activities that are fun and children enjoy.

- ▶ **Be Affectionate**  
Children feel good about themselves when they know they are loved. Receiving plenty of hugs and cuddles helps children feel wanted and loved.

- ▶ **Tell Your Child You Love Them**  
Children appreciate being told that they are loved. A quiet moment, such as putting a child to bed, can be a good time to say *I love you.*

- ▶ **Encourage Your Child To Set Goals**  
Children develop self-confidence when they set goals for themselves and then see they can achieve what they set out to do. Helping children set their own goals often follows after talking about an issue like schoolwork, sports, music or pocket money. Ask your child what they would like to do — *So what do you want to do about that? How many pages do you think you can read this week? What time would you like to do in your next race?*

- ▶ **Help Your Child Be a Good Friend**  
Having good friends has a major impact on children's self-esteem. Friends are important

but children do not always know how to look after them. Talk about being a good friend. This may include allowing a friend to choose games or activities, sharing their things, speaking nicely, and listening.

## Encourage Your Child To See Their Accomplishments

Encouraging children to look back on something they have done can be a good way to help them see their strengths. For example, if your child is proudly showing you a painting, ask them to tell you about it and how they feel about it. Encourage your child to think of things they did well. Tell your child it is okay to make mistakes.

To encourage your child to feel good about their achievements, prompt them to praise their own efforts — *Mary, tell me what you like about your painting* — or — *You got a B— last time for your social studies project and an A this time. What do you think about that?*

## Encourage Your Child To Express Their Ideas

Developing the confidence to share opinions, ideas, thoughts and hopes is related to children learning to express themselves. This skill can be developed by listening to what children have to say, summarising what you think they said, and asking questions about the issue they raised. Feeling valued in this way is important for children's self-esteem.

- ▶ **Encourage Laughter**  
Laughter is an emotional release. Children who feel good about themselves laugh spontaneously, develop a sense of humour and learn to tell jokes. Encourage this skill by listening to and enjoying your child's stories and laughing at their jokes.

- ▶ **Let Your Child Make Decisions**  
Children feel more confident when they have opportunities to make decisions. Where it is appropriate and safe, let children make decisions, such as what they would like to play, who they want to play with (within limits), what music they listen to, and which sports they enjoy. However, young children should not decide issues such as their bedtime, dinner time, what television programs they are allowed to watch, or what clothes they can wear to school. Involve your child in family decision-making such as deciding house rules.

## BECOMING A GOOD PROBLEM SOLVER

The ability to solve problems is an important life skill and is related to