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# BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM IN KIDS

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Most of us parents are looking for practical understandings and suggestions. Even those without young children can benefit from a better grasp of this most basic relationship—we are all, at least, children of the Lord.

The Bible explains over and over the essential patterns God has established in the making and the redeeming of the world. These patterns are woven into the fabric of Creation, and they have two source points. First, they are born out of who and what God is; they manifest His character and His essence. Second, they are designed to do us good; they exist to benefit us. Nothing about them is arbitrary or diminishing. Parenting, then, like all other aspects of living, is most effective when it lines up with the God-ordained patterns that are revealed in the Bible. I would like to suggest three practical ways to build children's sense of personal worth:

### **(1) WHAT WE DO TO THEM**

This boils down to what we do with our hands and what we do with our time. Children base their own sense of value on what happens to them. If they are struck or used unrighteously, they translate that abuse into a price tag labeled on their being. The focus of their soul shifts from their inner self to the external pain of the bruise or to the places where they were touched. Conversely, when parents appropriately touch the forehead, shoulder, hair, or other parts that have no sexual implications, children receive significance, rather than having it taken from them.

There is no substitute for time with kids. Children intuitively stack themselves up against all the other elements in their parent's schedule. And they can tell if they are simply another hassle in their parent's life, or, if all the other things are necessary distractions the parents gladly fight through in order to get to their kids.

**(2) WHAT WE SAY TO THEM**

This has to do not only with the actual words parents use, but also with their tone of voice. Children have no built-in vocabulary to describe themselves. They learn from parents what words to use in association with themselves: *handsome, helpful, amazing* or *stupid, bad, bothersome*. Parent's words are strongly prophetic—they actually shape a child's image (both inside and out).

When children hear the sound of affection and delight coming from their parents, those children can absorb all the compliments *without any embarrassment*. Kids feel no need to turn aside positive comments from their folks, so those statements are able to filter into their self-worth. What parents say is true of their kids (whether it is true or not) acts like a measuring stick for their children. Those same words are what kids use to evaluate future comments about them.

**(3) WHAT WE SAY ABOUT THEM**

It's tragic the way some parents will use what they say about their kids to get a laugh. They ridicule their children in front of other people, or make jibes about them to other people when their kids are present. The trauma of being mocked has an equally powerful counterpart—the delight of being praised by parents in other people's ears. To a child, what a parent speaks in public either reinforces private praise, or negates it.

But beyond this, I believe what parents say when the child is not around to hear may be more significant. Even if you don't believe that statements parents make about their kids affect those kids unknowingly (and I do), you will acknowledge that parents say what they *really* think when the child is not present. Attitudes are powerful. Getting in the habit of speaking well of your kids will go far towards building their self-esteem.