

Catholic Parenting 101

Tips for Building Strong Catholic Families

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Self-Esteem Boosters

We all want to see our children beam with self-esteem, but, as parents, we may feel lost as to how to accomplish this. And the stakes are high; children with low self-esteem can easily be swayed by negative peer influences. The good news is that parents can contribute to boosting their child's self-esteem. Here are three proven strategies for parents to creatively boost their child's self-esteem.

Strategy #1: Keep Children Connected with You and God

The foundation of a child's healthy self-esteem is a loving relationship with his or her parents and God. Children who experience this love come to know that they are valued because of who they are. This is particularly important to teach during times of disappointment or failure. For example, when your child is struggling with a friendship or rejection, take the time to comfort your child while praying for those involved. Help your child to ask God for the wisdom to know the best way to respond. In doing this, your child can experience nurturing love from you and from God, while also learning the fundamental skill of surrendering our relationships to God.

Strategy #2: Cultivate Success by Investing in Areas of Talent

Children develop self-esteem as they identify and develop their natural talents and interests. This can help children understand that God calls them to a special vocation, or a special role within the Church, the Body of Christ. Researchers have identified three core areas to explore when looking for a child's unique areas of talent:

- 1. Physical activities.** Some children like large motor activities, like soccer and dance, while others find fine-motor activities, like music and art, more to their liking.
- 2. Intellectual abilities.** These are not limited to the academic subjects in school, such as math and history. Other areas of natural interest are also

included, such as how video games are designed or how engines or computers work.

- 3. Social abilities.** Some children show a capacity for empathy for people in difficult situations, such as the homeless or children who are poor or sick.

Children need our help first to discover these areas of natural talent. Then they can explore other activities that will help further develop them. Parents should also consider environments outside the classroom to explore their children's talents, such as summer camps and community recreational classes. Parents can also plan vacations that offer their child the opportunity to explore and deepen areas of natural interest.

Strategy #3: Interpret Failures as Learning Experiences

Research shows that even failures can become self-esteem boosters, when children are taught to see failures as *temporary* (rather than permanent) and *impersonal* (rather than personal). So, for example, after a child fails a history test he can be encouraged to focus on what he learned about preparing for tests (a temporary event) rather than seeing this incident as evidence that he is stupid (a permanent descriptor). Similarly, when a child faces rejection, encourage them to focus on practical (impersonal) reasons people do not get invited to parties, such as guest limits and simple oversights. A child can also be encouraged to learn from this by focusing on how they have been treating their friends, using this as an encouragement to be a better, Christ-like friend to others.

Strong self-esteem is a necessary ingredient to help a child make healthy choices and to avoid getting swayed by negative peer influences. Parents have tremendous power to cultivate their child's self-esteem by keeping their child connected with them and with God, by identifying and cultivating their natural areas of talent, and by helping them skillfully interpret and learn from failure.

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