

**DEAF & HARD OF HEARING CHILDREN:
FOSTERING HEALTHY SELF-ESTEEM**



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What is self-esteem? Self-esteem is the feelings a person has about him/herself. Does the person like him/herself? Does he trust himself? Does she believe she can accomplish what she started out to do?

A child with healthy self-esteem will often:

- ★ Be proud of accomplishments.
- ★ Act independently.
- ★ Act in a responsible manner.
- ★ Handle frustrations well.
- ★ Try new challenges.
- ★ Feel able to influence others.
- ★ Express a variety of feelings.

A child with unhealthy self-esteem will often:

- ◆ Avoid situations that cause anxiety.
- ◆ Criticize his/her own talents.
- ◆ Feel that others don't value him/her.
- ◆ Blame others for his/her own weaknesses.
- ◆ Be easily influenced by others.
- ◆ Be defensive and easily frustrated.
- ◆ Feel powerless.

Harris Clemes and Reynold Bean, co-authors of *How to Raise Children's Self-Esteem*, state that children need four conditions to develop healthy self-esteem. These four conditions are *Sense of Connectiveness*, *Sense of Uniqueness*, *Sense of Power*, and *Sense of Models*.



The Sense of Connectiveness is when a child gains satisfaction from associations that are significant to that child and the importance of those associations has been affirmed by others.

According to Clemes and Bean, here are some ways to foster the *Sense of Connectiveness*:

- Show affection through physical contact.
- Show positive feelings with facial expressions.
- Use words when you feel good about your child.
- Make praise specific.
- Share interests, hobbies, activities, and family experiences with your child.
- Provide opportunities for family members to work and play together.
- Have weekly family meetings to discuss problems and seek solutions.
- Develop family rules that encourage good family relations.

Here are some ideas especially for deaf and hard of hearing children that Mary Bauer from Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services suggests:

- Establish communication guidelines for family gatherings and make sure everyone follows these rules, including the child who is deaf or hard of hearing.
- Be aware that your child may have a hard time understanding the names of various relatives or miss the details when hearing the family stories. Label pictures of family members; retell family stories again and again and again! Use maps or other visuals as necessary.
- Encourage your child to learn about people who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- Find a way for your child to meet other deaf and hard of hearing children.
- Discuss current news events related to deaf and hard of hearing people.
- Praise your child when s/he tell others how to better communicate with him/her – your child is making connections and taking responsibility for his/her own communication! (This is also a good one for the *Sense of Power*.)

One thing I'm already doing to foster my child's *Sense of Connectiveness* is:

One thing I'd like to try is:



The *Sense of Uniqueness* is when a child is able to acknowledge and respect the qualities or attributes that make them special and different. In turn, the child receives respect and approval from others for those qualities.

As suggested by Bean and Clemes, here are some ways to foster the *Sense of Uniqueness*:

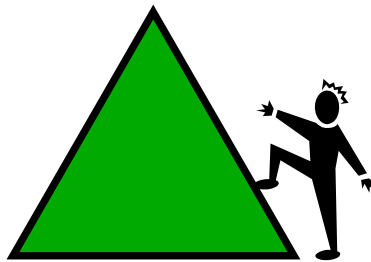
- Encourage your child to express ideas that may be different from your own.
- Point out how something about your child is different or special.
- Allow your child to do things his/her own way (as much as possible)
- Increase opportunities for your child to express him/herself creatively.
- Allow private space or special places for each member of the family.
- Consider your child's special skills, talents or interests when you assign duties or chores.

Here are some ideas especially for deaf and hard of hearing children that Mary Bauer from Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services suggests:

- View your child as a WHOLE person – who s/he is cannot be defined by or limited to what is on the audiogram.
- Hearing loss does not need to be viewed as a loss or deficit. Try to guide your child to seeing the positive side of his/her hearing loss (but at the same time acknowledge his/her feelings about the negative things associated with being hard of hearing or deaf).
- If your child wants to try music or dance as a form of expression – encourage and support him/her!

One thing I'm already doing to foster my child's *Sense of Uniqueness* is:

One thing I'd like to try is:



The *Sense of Power* comes about when a child has the resources, opportunity, and capability to influence the circumstances of his/her life in important ways.

Clemes and Bean offer these suggestions as ways to foster the *Sense of Power*.

- ✧ Make sure your child is confronted with issues of personal responsibility.
- ✧ Let your child know that s/he is responsible for what s/he feels.
- ✧ Teach your child how s/he can influence people in a positive way.
- ✧ Teach your child better ways to solve problems.
- ✧ When a child shows s/he can do something well, allow him/her to do it.

- ✧ Family members should be involved in significant decisions that affect them.
- ✧ Encourage your child to take on more challenging tasks and responsibilities.

Here are some ideas especially for deaf and hard of hearing children that Mary Bauer from Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services suggests:

- ✧ At certain ages your child may rebel (this may include refusing to wear hearing aids/cochlear implant or refusing to cue/sign). This is the normal part of growing up. Pick your battles wisely! It's hard to let go but sometimes letting go is necessary for your child's personal growth.
- ✧ Your hard of hearing or deaf child may think s/he has less control over his/her environment. Whenever possible, tell your child what is going on and, if possible, purchase alerting devices.
- ✧ Guide your child in learning how to solve his/her own communication challenges.
- ✧ Allow your hard of hearing or deaf child to do the same things at the same age as his/her hearing siblings or peers.
- ✧ The same rules should apply to your hard of hearing or deaf child. If rules are broken, s/he needs to have the same consequences as hearing siblings.
- ✧ Let your child make mistakes and experience failure – that's the "real" world and is a great learning experience.

One thing I'm already doing to foster my child's *Sense of Power* is:

One thing I'd like to try is:



The *Sense of Models* is when a child is able to refer to adequate human, philosophical, and operational examples that serve to help establish meaningful values, goals, ideals, and personal standards.

Again, here are some ways suggested by Bean and Clemes to foster the *Sense of Models*:

- Help your child to understand what s/he believes.
- Share what you believe with your child.
- Help your child to understand the consequences of his/her behavior.
- Let your child know what you expect, and make performance standards clear.
- Be a good model for your child.
- Make sure planning is an ongoing process in the family.
- Keep a general sense of orderliness in the family and home.

Here are some ideas especially for deaf and hard of hearing children that Mary Bauer from Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services suggests:

- Model how to handle problems related to your child's hearing loss in his/her presence.
- How you react when people ask about your child's hearing loss will be an example for your child – s/he is watching!
- Try to have your child meet deaf and hard of hearing adults-- they need positive role models. It is also great for kids to meet other kids who are a few years older and are similar to them (have a cochlear implant; ASL is their primary language; use cued speech; wear hearing aids, etc.).
- When helping your child set goals, never use his/her hearing loss as an excuse. However, help him/her realize what is realistic and what is *unrealistic*.

One thing I'm already doing to foster my child's *Sense of Models* is:

One thing I'd like to try is:

Additional Comments:

(Taken from *You, Your Child and Self-Esteem* by the Channing L. Bete Company)

- ❖ Self-esteem influences your child's ability to learn, grow, be creative, relate to others, make healthy choices, and reach goals.
- ❖ Toddlers tend to have a lot of self-confidence. They are eager to explore new thoughts, feelings, objects, and people.
- ❖ School-age children are often unsure. They may doubt their abilities as they learn to do things on their own.
- ❖ Pre-adolescents may feel embarrassed and sensitive about their bodies. As they mature, they may feel confident one minute and insecure the next.
- ❖ High-school kids feel the challenge of independence. They need to stand apart from their parents and other adults. Peer acceptance becomes an importance confidence-builder.
- ❖ Self-esteem is built on good relationships – and good relationships are built on communication.

SUGGESTIONS FOR PARENTS: HELPING CHILDREN ACHIEVE SELF-DETERMINATION

Being aware of the significance of self-esteem and decision-making and problem-solving skills in a young person's overall development does not necessarily mean that parents and professionals know how to encourage the growth of these skills. The following suggestions for how parents and others can help children and young adults with disabilities develop a sense of self-worth and self-sufficiency have been developed from readings in disability literature and from conversations with individuals with disabilities.

1. Treat your child with a disability as a capable human being by encouraging and supporting his or her efforts to explore, take healthy risks, and try out new situations.
2. Provide opportunities for self-awareness by focusing on your child's strengths and the qualities that make him or her special and unique.
3. Let your child know that you enjoy spending time with him or her. Try to really listen when your child shares thoughts and experiences with you.
4. Share your family stories, histories, and traditions with your child to help the child understand that he or she is a member of a family circle, with a permanent place in the larger scheme of things.
5. Provide opportunities for interaction with others of different ages and backgrounds to help your child develop social confidence.
6. Help your child experience success by encouraging him or her to build on known strengths and abilities.

7. Acknowledge your child's efforts toward a goal, not just the final product or accomplishment.
8. Have realistic expectations; don't expect so much that your child is set up for failure or frustration, or so little that you communicate a lack of faith.
9. Let your child take responsibility for his or her own actions.
10. Acknowledge your child's presence. Include your child in discussions with family and friends. Don't interfere unnecessarily to answer questions that were directed at the child.
11. Give you child a chance to grow into a unique adult. Avoid using labels such as "shy," "lazy," or "clumsy" to describe your child.
12. Respect your child's need for privacy and time alone. Don't intrude unless it is absolutely necessary.
13. Promote your child's assertive (not aggressive) behavior as well as respect for others. Being assertive is an excellent way for your child to avoid being exploited or taken advantage of.
14. Encourage your child to practice and use basic coping statements to handle difficult emotions, such as anger, jealousy, fear, but by all means, encourage their expression. (An example of a coping statement might be: "I can do this. I'll be just fine." or, "I really feel upset, but I need to stay calm.")
15. Acknowledge your own sense of self-worth, when appropriate. Your healthy self-image will be a good model for your child.

There are many resources available to help parents understand their role in helping their child with disabilities learn to achieve self-determination.

As you face your responsibility as a parent, a teacher, or a professional in helping a child with disabilities achieve self-sufficiency, remember that learning to be independent is a difficult task for all young adults. Likewise, it is sometimes difficult to earnestly encourage a child's independence: letting go is one of the most difficult tasks that parents face. What is important to realize is that all children, regardless of their strengths and weaknesses, have to try many times -- and sometimes fail-- before they can gain the self-assurance and sense of personal worth that comes with adulthood.

Taken from Transitional Summary, Number 5, 1988. National Information Center for Children and Youth with Handicaps (NICHCY). Washington, DC: Interstate Research Associates.



This information was developed by Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services – Metro Office. This information is available in other forms to people with disabilities by calling your local Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services office. For speech-to-speech relay services, contact us through the Minnesota Relay Service at 1-877-627-3848.



Minnesota Department of **Human Services** -

Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services – Metro Office

651/431-5940 (Voice) 1-888-206-6513 (TTY) 651/431-7587 (FAX)