



# FAMILY *Matters*

## True Self-esteem

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In the late 1960s, there was a self-esteem movement in the United States which had good intentions. The goal of that movement was to help children and young adults feel good about themselves based on their accomplishments and achievements. While some have stayed true to that original conceptualization, many people have morphed the positively intended movement in a negative direction by focusing on preventing disappointment and frustration as well as providing significant non-achievement or non-accomplishment based praise, rewards and positive feedback. This approach limits the ability of children to learn from natural life lessons and protects them from learning how to deal with frustrations and struggles. This in turn diminishes their self-esteem because they've not truly learned how to manage dilemmas successfully since they have been denied of the opportunity to do so. Many parents have given an overabundance of positive praise on their children not connected to any achievement, accomplishment and/or efforts to work hard at something. This approach breeds narcissistic entitlement, not self-esteem.

It is important to realize that self-esteem comes from positive feedback, praise and rewards connected to putting out effort to achieve a goal, or for accomplishments and achievements. This could also include trying something new and or challenging. It is important to provide children and young adults with an opportunity to figure things out on their own with parental guidance, promote developmentally appropriate independence and decision making, and to challenge your children to work through difficult situations. I am currently treating several students who are struggling to address common frustrations and problems that they have not had an opportunity to address on their own because the parents have protected them from these struggles. This type of parenting is often referred to as "snowplow parenting" where parents clear the path of all frustrations and struggles so the child can achieve a goal, but it leaves children and young adults without the skills to manage situations on their own. In the end, this lowers their self-esteem.

### Here are some strategies to promote true self-esteem

- Provide realistic positive feedback based on application of effort, and achievement of goals and accomplishments.
- Refrain from general feedback such as "you are the best" which usually serves to promote narcissistic entitlement.
- The feedback that is provided should be specific to what was done. For example, "I really like the effort you put in to study for the math test which is usually a difficult area for you."
- Feedback and praise should be made while making eye contact with the recipient so you can ensure that person has given you their full attention.
- Discourage your athletic organizations from giving trophies to everyone for simply participating. Participation acknowledgment should be more modest, and a trophy should be given for those who have achieved something specific that required hard work to achieve.
- In athletic contests, it is helpful to encourage competition to achieve specific outcomes as these become necessary learning experiences in life, especially as we receive feedback in the areas we need to improve upon.
- Don't be afraid to challenge your children to work through difficult situations rather than protecting them from these struggles.

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