

## Youth Count Column: May 2012: “Building Self-Esteem”

Self-esteem is the way a person evaluates his or her own competence and worth. It isn't inherited like brown eyes or curly hair; it's taught. Self-esteem can be built and strengthened over time, or it can be gradually eroded. Research connects low self-esteem with problems like violence, alcoholism, drug abuse, eating disorders, school dropouts, suicide, low academic achievement and teenage pregnancy.

By teaching our kids to value themselves and the things they're good at, they also learn how important it is to be treated with respect and valued by others.

As you read the tips below and then as you try putting them into action with young people in your life, try to remember how you felt at the age that child or teen is. What encouraged you, made you feel supported and what discouraged you or made you feel unvalued. Your own experiences are good gauges for how – or how not to – interact with kids in your life.

- Acknowledge a job well done. Telling kids they did a good job helps motivate them to perform well.
- If you get angry, explain why you're angry. And don't just give negative feedback, explain it: “This disappoints me because I know you're smart enough to do a much better job.”
- Help kids problem-solve when appropriate, but don't solve their problems for them. Ask them if they need your help deciding what to do and then share your views.
- Ask for your child's opinion. Kids develop opinions very early; ask them what they are, ask them why.
- Encourage your kids to walk in another's shoes. Respect and esteem for others goes hand-in-hand with self-esteem.
- Know that they will make mistakes – regardless of their age. We're not perfect and neither are they.
- Remind them of what they're good at. None of us are good at everything but offer encouragement and remind them of areas where they excel.
- Be attentive. To be ignored can make kids feel unimportant.
- Be genuine with praise; false praise can cause more harm than good.
- Take their feelings seriously (again, try to remember how real feeling were when you were a teen).

These tips and many more can be found at [www.parentfurther.com](http://www.parentfurther.com) – a Search Institute resource for families.

For more information about helping our youth, phone 812-923-1160, email [barbara@youthcount.com](mailto:barbara@youthcount.com) or visit [www.youthcount.com](http://www.youthcount.com)