

# Improve self esteem

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Development of self-esteem begins early.

Recent research has shown that on an average, a child receives 25,000 hours of parent input by the age of 12, and most of it is disapproving. By the time a child is 16, he/she had been criticised, told off or punished at least 70,000 times. And for every word of praise, encouragement or trust, at least 10 negative injunctions were recorded. Is it surprising that psychologists consider low self-esteem as a major

## Positive feedback in a child's environment is crucial.

cause of childhood problems? Right from underachievement at school, it is also the prime cause of a wide range of neurotic conditions that continue into adulthood — alcohol, tobacco and drug abuse, emotional maturity, suicidal tendencies, crimes of violence and many more. It could, if it were a physical illness, well be treated as an epidemic.

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Consider a baby — he has no image problem. Then at the toddler state many a time he is told off for something he does but does not think it is wrong to do so. And then comes the school going stage. It is traumatic and

from being the centre of your parents' lives you become just one among a large group of children.

Says Brinda Jayaraman, Counselling Psychologist, "For an individual with low self-esteem, life can be an endless struggle. He may hesitate to take up responsibilities, fear rejection, cannot accept criticism and is always looking for reinforcement.

### Positive strokes

For every child, the development of self-esteem begins at the moment the child starts seeking independence, whether it is to stand or sit on his/her own. Positive feedback from the key people in the child's environment is

therefore very crucial."

While experiments have shown how a teacher's expectation of a child influences his success, research has shown that even a child's performance at school might be linked to his/her appearance. And distressingly, research shows that an average teacher does not expect beautiful children to be dull.

But it is in the adolescent years that feelings of inadequacy reach their peak. Counselling psychologist, G.L. Sampoorna says, "In India, parents naturally have strong emotional bonds with children, and feel more responsible. But many times they do not know

where to draw the line, lose objectivity, enforce their own views or influences and end up giving negative inputs. Naturally, a child loses his/her own sense of identity and strength. How you evaluate the self is termed self-concept, and individual's destiny can ultimately be linked to his/her self-concept. It affects your beliefs, then your perceptions, in turn your attitudes, thereafter actions and consequent performance, and ultimately the results, which again add to your self-concept." □

### What parents can do:

- Give positive inputs to children. One way to do this is engage in the following exercise — Record how many negative inputs (even the ones in jest like 'little monkey', 'lazy bones' — because the subconscious doesn't have a sense of humour) you give in a day. The next day record how many positive remarks you make. Remember, it takes nine positive remarks to neutralise one negative remark.
- Be issue specific.
- Give unconditional love.
- Improve self-concept.
- Teach children to use positive affirmations. □