Confident Kids

Make Your kids as well rounded, happy and confident as possible.

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Creating Confident Kids

Although nobody gets a parenting manual or bible in the delivery room, it is our duty as parents to try to make our kids as well rounded, happy and confident as possible. It is a lot easier to bring up great kids than it is to try and fix problems caused by bad parenting, when our kids have become adults.

Our children are all individuals – they are not our property but people in their own right. Too many people have children for the wrong reasons – they want someone to love them or they want to live on through their kids. Children deserve respect and must be allowed to become their own person. They are not mini versions of their parents – well at least they shouldn't be.

From the day they are born, kids should be allowed to find their own way in this world and at their own pace. Now, I am not suggesting for a second that you abandon them to their own devices. What I mean is that your role as a parent is similar to that of a coach. You should be there to cheer them on as they move towards different goals, but never try and push them to do something they are not yet ready for.

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Instilling Confidence in Your Baby

Watch your verbal and non verbal communications with your baby. Listen to them when they communicate with you. For example, babies use crying to communicate. Generally a baby will only cry when he needs something i.e. nappy to be changed, he is hungry or he is scared and wants a cuddle.

A baby who is held and cuddled will grow more secure knowing he is valued and loved. That is why I hate a parenting trend that developed a few years ago which suggested that babies should be left to cry. In my opinion this is very cruel and potentially damaging to the child. How can a baby trust his parents if they ignore him when he needs them most?

Despite not being able to talk in a language we comprehend, babies probably understand more than you can imagine. Infants and small children are like sponges – they soak up everything we say and do. It is important that you speak to your baby encouraging them to mimic you and the noises he hears around him. Sing to him – most babies love singing and they don't mind if you are tone deaf!

Baby massage is wonderful for generating a close bond between parents and child. But massage also instills confidence in an infant. The gentle touch causes his body to release feel good hormones and make him feel safe.

In the early years especially, a child views his parents as his whole universe. He wants to keep mummy and daddy happy. He basks in your love and attention. He expects to get your approval when he tries new things. All babies will try things at different times. Depending on his learning style, some things will come easy to him whilst others will take a little longer to master. By all means encourage him to explore his boundaries but do it in a relaxed way.

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If mum is pushing him to do something that he is not yet ready for, he will sense her disappointment in him and that will knock his confidence thus starting a cycle which may delay mum getting her way. Just because you don't voice your frustration out loud doesn't mean that your child hasn't picked up on the non verbal signal. Infants are wired to pick up on the non verbal signals possibly more than the verbal ones.

It doesn't matter if Mary down the road has been potty trained since she was 6 months old. Your child isn't Mary and will develop at his own pace. Those parents who constantly push their children to walk early, talk early etc set them up for a life of disappointment as they constantly battle to overcome silly tests set by other people.

If on the other hand, mum is confident that junior will be potty trained, walking and talking by the time he goes to school, Junior will feel loved and accepted which will increase his self worth. It may also make him achieve things quicker and easier as he will have the confidence to experiment knowing that no matter what he is loved!

Don't fall into the trap of thinking that you have to amuse your baby all day. That will only exhaust both of you. Babies need to learn to spend quality time on their own just as older children need to learn to amuse themselves. You cannot love yourself and be confident in who you are if you have never got to know yourself. So let baby spend some time in his cot or playpen with a couple of favourite toys. If you listen carefully, you could just hear him having a great chat with his new friends.

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Confident Toddlers

The baby phase passes so quickly – you should try and enjoy as much of it as possible as once a child has grown you cannot recapture this magical time.

Leaving babyhood behind your child becomes a toddler. How do you know when your baby has become a toddler? There is no specific age but believe me you will know when it happens. The defining moment for me is when you realise that the baby who did everything you said now wants to put his own mark on the day.

When you have a toddler, take some time out to sit down and play with him every day. Get down onto the floor at his level and spend quality time with him. He will love the attention and he won't be a toddler for very long. Also by putting yourself on his level, you can see potentially dangerous hazards that you may not have noticed from your taller viewpoint!

Children learn from play – it is very important to give them as much opportunity and encouragement to let their imaginations run wild. Feed their inner belief that they can do or achieve anything they want to in life. Give them paint and messy stuff to play with and see what they get up to.

When buying them toys, don't opt for the most expensive item – you will only please the marketing company behind it! Kids have no real conception of money and they are likely to get a lot more long term enjoyment out of the box that the toy came in rather than the figure from the latest movie.

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Also buy age appropriate toys – you won't inspire your child to become the next Albert Einstein by giving him a chemistry set when he is 2. Again, don't push your child too fast or too quickly. Let him enjoy his toddlerhood as school is just around the corner.

It is very important that both parents support and agree with each other on how to raise a child. If one parent says that something should be done a certain way, the other parent must back them up. If they disagree, then have a chat about it later in private. But always try to present a united front when it comes to parenting and discipline.

Toddlers learn very quickly how to play mummy against daddy and this will only lead to heartache and frustration for all concerned. Show your child that both of his parents love him and hopefully each other. People who show each other mutual respect and appreciation are good role models for your child to adopt.

Remember to praise your toddler but try not to link it to behaviour all the time. A confident child is born when his parents praise him for his beautiful smile or fantastic laugh and not just for his ability to use the potty!

It is crucial that both parents to establish an individual relationship with their child. Children need mummy and daddy. Some mums find it difficult not to hover around when dad is looking after THEIR baby. But whilst a lot of dads won't be the best at nappy changing or other baby related tasks, the safety of their kids is very important to them. Boys in particular learn from their dads. In this day of long working hours, a lot of dads don't see their kids during the week. Make time at the weekends to develop that special bond with your kids.

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If mum also works full time, try to make an arrangement with your employer so that you can be at home before your toddler goes to bed. Making dinner or doing the housework can wait. Spend some quality time with your toddler, read him a story whilst giving him loads of cuddles. This way you are reinforcing the message that he is a very special person who is loved and treasured.

A lot of working mums spend the weekend sorting out the house, doing the shopping and getting ready for the next week. All of this has to be done but your priority should be spending time getting to know your children. Shop online and have the groceries delivered rather than dragging your toddler to the shops on a Saturday.

If you are lucky to be in a two parent family, arrange family outings. These do not need to be expensive. Toddlers love exploring in parks and feeding the ducks and swans.

Try and give them freedom in the playground. Encourage them to be adventurous and to try out new things. If you go to any play centre you are likely to hear mothers telling their kids to be careful or they will get hurt. Don't go too high, too fast, too slow etc. These mothers mean well – they are trying to prevent their child sustaining an injury. But kids need to run free sometimes. I am not suggesting that you let them play in traffic but in the safety of a play centre, you might want to curb your own fears and let them get on with it. Sure, they may fall and hurt themselves but generally it will be very minor and completely forgotten as they excitedly tell you they went the highest, fastest etc.

We need to accept that bruises, minor broken bones and other injuries are part of childhood. As a mum you will spend time in the hospital – great leaders such as Nelson Mandela were not kept tied to their mothers apron strings. Within reason, you need to encourage risk taking.

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Taking calculated risks and winning will instill confidence in your child and motivate them to believe that if they try hard enough just about anything is possible.

Finally remember that babies who grow into toddlers for a reason. Most toddlers will severely test their parents patience at some point. There is a reason why the “ terrible two’s” are called that name. There will be days when all of us will lose our tempers and say something that we shouldn’t to our young children. Don’t obsess over this – as long as it doesn’t become a pattern it won’t stop your child being confident. Just apologise and move on. You are showing your toddler that mummy or daddy can make mistakes too and that they are also human beings!

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A Confident Child

Now your child is growing older it is even more important that you provide a positive role model for your child. We are all a product of our upbringing and early environment. We are conditioned to respond to certain situations and stimuli.

In Victorian times, and in some societies in our modern world, children were expected "to be seen but not heard!" How could that possibly instill a sense of self worth into a child? They are so valuable to their parents, that the adult would prefer them to pretend they weren't there! No wonder children brought up in this type of environment lack confidence and belief in themselves.

If as a child, all you hear is your parents moaning and complaining about how hard life is, how difficult EVERYONE else makes their job, how awful the boss is, it is easy to see how the child can become negative about the world in general.

Don't let them hear you saying you can't do x, y or z. Actions speak louder than words so if there is something you are afraid of doing, why not see can you beat that fear. Parents who approach everything in life with a "I can do that" attitude are much more likely to raise confident kids.

So try putting on a pair of rose tinted glasses especially around your kids. Make an effort to make positive statements and see the silver lining in all the dark clouds. Give your children the chance to be a positive, well rounded human being and you never know you may enjoy life a little better as well.

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We live in a time pressed society where everyone is so busy working, paying bills and constantly trying to catch up on life. With the current economic downturn, more of us are stressed over the bills and our jobs. Children don't understand that it is outside influences that are causing mum and dad to be snappy or hassled – they can very easily believe that they have done something wrong.

So try to take some time out and take your kids out to the park for some fun. Or play a board game with them. There is nothing like children's laughter to melt away your problems or worries if only for a little while. And children don't need expensive toys and games to be happy. They need love and attention from the people that matters most to them i.e. you.

Create a happy safe family environment in your home where everyone, regardless of age, is respected and admired.

Children, like adults, need affection. They need to know that someone loves them enough to give them time, cuddles, attention. Kids will be more confident in themselves if their parents actually seem to enjoy their company. If their parents make time to play with them and amuse them rather than sending them in to watch TV or play with their toys, they will have higher self esteem.

On the topic of TV, limit how much television your child watches. TV and computers don't help to stimulate your child's imagination or creativity if overused. Children are much better off outdoors exploring their back gardens then indoors watching an educational nature program on the TV.

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Children are curious by nature – that is how they learn. Encourage your child to discover the world for himself whilst at the same time keeping him out of danger. So whilst you might not relish them tasting an ant as my boy did, the ant won't harm him. It helps to keep things in perspective. Kids need to get dirty be it whilst they are painting or playing in the mud. Clothes can be washed, repaired or replaced – childhood memories of fun and laughter can't!

In fact the trend for parents, schools and childcare facilities today not to let children be kids in case they hurt themselves is not conducive to creating positive confident adults. If we are constantly telling our children that the world is a bad place, full of people who will hurt them, how can we expect them to grow into well rounded individuals? They are more likely to be scared of their own shadows!

So what can you do? Well firstly put things into perspective. The dangers have always been there in some shape or form. Unfortunately children have been abused and mistreated since time began. Tragic cases like Madeline McCann are unusual and not the norm. So if your child wants to walk to school by themselves, meet them halfway if it is safe to do so. For younger children, rather than walk them to the classroom door, why not try leaving them at the school gates. You can wait discretely to make sure that they haven't come out again.

So how do we nurture our kids to become confident without turning them into spoilt brats! Well, most kids will copy their parents so actions speak louder than words. If you are constantly shouting at or disrespecting your partner, then you cannot expect your child to be respectful to other people.

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Be careful not to criticise your child. Recent studies have shown that over 90% of the communication that a child hears before their 5th birthday will be negative. Think about it. We often criticise our kids without meaning to hurt them or attack them. How often have you said to your child "you are so messy – your toys are everywhere!", or "your writing is so untidy" or "why can't you behave like Jonny down the street".

As parents, most of us are not intentionally hurting our children but if, as a child, all you hear is "don't do that" or "you are untidy, lazy, irresponsible, not as good as Jonny etc", then you are either going to do one to two things. The child will believe that he is always bad no matter what he does so he might as well act up. He becomes rebellious, aggressive and very hard to manage. Or he believes that he is totally worthless so gives up trying and becomes withdrawn, lacking in confidence and suffering poor self esteem.

Be careful to listen to your child and pay attention to what they are telling you not what you think you hear. If a child comes home from school telling you that everyone else in the class is much better/smarter than them, the worst thing you can do is pat them on the head and tell them they are being silly.

You have just undermined their confidence and belief in themselves – they trusted you with their feelings and you have dismissed them. Instead, try and sit down with your child and ask them why they think that way. In language which they will understand but not find patronising, try and explain that some people are better than others in certain fields but they are not as good as your child in xxx. X being whatever it is your child excels in and we all excel in something – you just have to find it.

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Never tell your child to grow up or stop behaving like a baby. Children sometimes struggle with their emotions just like adults do. They can feel overwhelmed by life and this can be illustrated by a "babyish" reaction. Again try talking to them and finding out what is making them feel that way. It is only by talking and listening to your child, that you can help them. They will trust you and become more confident in their own abilities to solve their own problems or issues.

If they are behaving like a baby (and are not still in nappies) then find out why. They may be tired or just having a bad day. Try and distract them but do not focus on the "babyish" behaviour. We all have days that you would prefer to spend in bed with the duvet over your head and as the day goes by you wish you had– kids are no different.

Find reasons to praise your child but keep it in perspective. If you praise everything your child does, they will learn that the praise is not worth having or else they may think that they need somebody else's approval for every action they take. If your child has done something amazing – then by all means praise them. But telling them they are the next Michelangelo when they build a clay model is pushing it. Unless of course it is amazing and he is a junior expert in sculpting.

Sometimes parents take this advice and start praising their child for being good or getting good grades in school. But you can inadvertently teach a child that in order to get your approval they must be the best behaved or get the highest marks all the time. Instead, why not comment on your child's laugh or running abilities or smile.

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Think about how much attention you give your child and whether it is positive or negative. If you have two children in the one room and one is playing nicely by himself whilst the other is climbing on the sofa. Who gets your attention? Usually the one playing on the sofa as he gets told off. The other child gets ignored so both children learn that negative behaviour will get mum or dads attention.

A different tactic would be to praise the child playing nicely and ignore the one climbing on the furniture. Now the message that is coming across is that positive behaviour gets attention and one thing all kids the world over have in common is that they like attention.

Also show your kids some appreciation. Say thank you to them if they help with the dishes or tidy up their toys. Catch them being good and you may just find that they are good more often!

A lot of our parenting is done on autopilot and is based on what we learnt from our parents even if we don't agree with it now we are adults. For example, being the eldest I was constantly told (or at least it felt like constantly!) that I had to take care of the younger ones or that I should know better. I swore I would never use this expression with my kids. Yet the other day I told my five year old that he should know better than his cousin when they were both being naughty. My son asked but why? And my answer – "because you are older!" . I nearly died – he is only a couple of months older and here was me sounding exactly like my own mum.

Don't misunderstand me – I had fantastic parents but like most parents they occasionally got it wrong and I truly believe that constantly expecting me to behave better as I was the oldest was one of their mistakes. But then I am probably biased!

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We need to watch our language with our kids and make sure that we label the behaviour as “wrong” or “naughty” rather than the child. A child is not going to have a healthy value of their own worth if they believe that they are naughty and evil. So next time you discipline your child (and all children need discipline at times!), try to remember to use appropriate language. If they have hit another child, then you could say “hitting is naughty” rather than say “you are really naughty”.

Let your children solve their own problems or at least attempt to do so. Obviously the type of problem they are able to resolve will depend on their age. For example, if an older child wants the best trainers for football, try and encourage them to think of ways that they can earn some money towards the cost of the trainers.

For younger children you could let them do their own school homework. An example of this happened to my friend recently. Her son, aged 5, was asked to make a castle and bring it into school the next week. So my friend gave him some cereal boxes, glue and crayons and he was very proud of his castle. The only help my friend gave was to do some cutting for him. His pride in his own work took a beating when they arrived at school to find that the parents of his classmates had obviously decided that the homework was meant for them. A section of the castles had moats filled with water whilst others had pink turrets made from bricks.

You probably can see the picture. If you have spent any time at a school with your child, you have seen this scene before. My friend’s son cried his eyes out. But my friend told her little boy that it didn’t matter what the other castles were like – he had made him himself and that is exactly what the teacher wanted. His very wise teacher obviously agreed as she judged his cereal boxes as the winner and he got pride of place in the classroom.

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In raising a confident child, motivation is one of the greatest gifts you can give them. Children who are not motivated are down, depressed, bored, listless etc. Not a happy picture is it? Kids are born believing they can do anything – look at any toddler who learns to walk. He will never believe he cannot do it – he falls over again and again but he always gets back up until one day he walks on his own. So it is very distressing to see children, particularly young children, lose that belief in their inner abilities.

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What Causes Loss of Self-Worth?

- Constant Criticism – if they are always wrong why should they bother trying?

- Lack of attention – what is the point in achieving anything if nobody cares?

- Lack of expectation – kids tend to live up to the expectations we set for them. If you expect your child to be naughty all the time, that is what generally happens!

- Lack of energy – poor diet or an underlying illness can sap anyone's energy levels.

- Lack of self worth – if children feel that they are unloved and unwanted, they will slowly lose respect for themselves

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So What Can You Do?

- Use praise but don't overdo it. It is pointless to praise anybody if they haven't put the effort into a task. Children will learn when you mean the praise and when it is said just to please them.

- Don't follow praise with a "but if" – how many times have we heard parents say to their kids – that was fantastic well done, but if you had ran a little faster you would have come first! Sorry, but I believe that is more damaging to a child then not acknowledging his achievement in the first place. Praise should never be used as an instrument of criticism however well meant.

- Remember children build belief in themselves by achieving things rather than just hearing your praise. Parents help by giving children opportunities to try things out for themselves. They will make mistakes but that is how we all learn. Nobody is born knowing how to drive a car or ride a bike. You learn and by learning and mastering a skill you gain self confidence and a belief in your own abilities.

- Don't compare your child to other children including their siblings. It is not relevant what their older or younger brothers can do, it is what they do that matters.

- Make eye contact with your child. Get down on their level when you speak to them – it is very hard to motivate someone when you are towering over them.

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- Acknowledge your child's feelings. Everyone feels scared or lonely sometimes – it is natural and that applies to kids as well.

- Let them make their own choices, within reason! If it is safe for them to do so, let them continue down the path they have chosen. For example, if they have picked out their clothes for the day let them wear them even if the pink shirt clashes with the orange trousers. Who cares? If you let them be individuals now, they are less likely to follow the crowd when the teenage peer pressure begins.

- Listen to your child. Often as adults, we listen with one ear but our minds are focused on something else. If your son or daughter sees that you are not really listening to them, they will interpret it as proof you don't care.

- Don't underestimate the strength of their feelings and never make fun of them. If they have told you how they are feeling, respect that and work it out with them. Try not to tell them that they are being babyish and have nothing to be scared of.

- On the same note, watch how your praise is received. Some kids don't want to be praised loudly in front of their friends – it just isn't cool. This is especially true of boys so be alert to their feelings and have some tact.

- Don't forget that they are children so may take longer to decipher what it is they are trying to achieve.

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All children love stories not least because it gives them the undivided time and attention from their parents. You can use story time to motivate your child. Weave in examples of the type of behaviour you are trying to achieve into the story but do it subtly. If you overdo it, your child will lose interest and you will have ruined this special time.

Never forget the power of touch with children (and it works well with adults too when used appropriately!). When you are praising your child, touch their hand or give them a hug. The affection combined with the praise will reinforce the message that they are somebody very special.

Remember your role as a coach rather than a fixer. Your aim is to rear children who become positive role models as adults. You are preparing your child to one day take complete responsibility for himself and his actions.

You cannot do this if you do not start early and teach him independence, confidence in his abilities, allow him to make appropriate age related decisions etc. If you see your role as a coach i.e. someone who encourages from the sidelines rather than living the child's life for them you won't go far wrong.

Keeping your child dependent on you doesn't do anyone any good – it fosters resentment and anger in a bond that should be very precious – the bond between a parent and child is the only example of pure unconditional love we have. You should love your children unconditionally and accept them for whom they are not whatever you wish them to be.

Raising a child who has healthy self esteem and belief in his own abilities will enable him to go on and become a very successful well rounded adult – surely that should be the aim of every parent today.

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