

Supporting children's confidence

Mateo really likes football but he's not sure about playing with the local team. He thinks: "I'm not as good as the other children are. What if they don't pass the ball to me? What if I drop it?" Mateo often stops himself from having a go at new things. He doesn't want to look silly.

He would rather let others go first so he can watch what they do. At school when the teacher asks him a question he often says, "I don't know," even if he does know the answer. Mateo doesn't want to get things wrong. When he makes a mistake on his homework he gives up and says, "I can't do it."

His parents want him to try. "You've got to have a go," his dad says, "otherwise, how will you learn?"

Children who lack confidence in their abilities sometimes try to avoid even having a go at some things. This can get frustrating for parents and carers. It can also stop children from developing the skills they need to tackle tasks confidently.

How confidence develops

For most children, starting school means spending more time on learning and less on play. It also means more expectations of them – from parents, carers, school staff and also from themselves.

Primary school children typically start out with high expectations. When they see how well they do things compared to others, their view of their own abilities often changes. They learn that they are good at some things and not so good at others. They also see how other children and school staff respond to what they do. These things influence children's confidence in their abilities. They also influence how willing they are to have a go in situations where they feel unsure.





How parents and carers can help

Confidence improves through building on small successes. Parents and carers (and school staff) can help by:

- explaining to children that skills develop with practice
- encouraging children to persist when they don't succeed straight away
- praising effort, persistence and improvement
- making sure that goals are achievable by breaking down large tasks or responsibilities into small steps
- being ready to help when necessary, without taking over.

Encouraging children to have a go and valuing individual improvement support children's confidence.

Confident thinking

Self-esteem is an important part of confidence. Having good self-esteem means accepting and feeling positive about yourself. Confidence is not just *feeling* good but also knowing you are good *at something*.

Particular ways of thinking are very important for building confidence. Helpful ways of thinking include:

- believing that, if you try, you can succeed
- finding positive ways to cope with failure that encourage having another go
- enjoying learning for its own sake by competing with your own performance rather than that of others
- making sure that goals are achievable by breaking down large tasks or responsibilities into small steps
- being ready to help when necessary, without taking over.

Dealing with disappointment

Everybody fails to achieve their goals sometimes. Parents and carers (and school staff) can help by:

- responding sympathetically and with encouragement (eg "That was disappointing, but at least you had a go.")
- helping children focus on what they can change to make things better, rather than thinking that the situation is unchangeable or that there is something wrong with them (eg "What can you try that might make that work better next time?")
- challenging 'I can't' thinking by showing and saying you believe in them and reminding them of what they have achieved.

Optimistic thinking recognises what has been achieved more than what is lacking. It looks at the glass as half-full rather than half-empty.

Parents and carers can help children focus on their own effort and on achieving personal goals as the best way to measure success.

This resource is part of a range of KidsMatter Primary information sheets for families and school staff. View them all online at www.kidsmatter.edu.au



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