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Assessing and Reinforcing Your Child's Self-Esteem

Consider the following questions about your child's self-esteem:

- What does your child think he does well? Identify and build on your child's perceived strengths and talents.
- How does your child respond to failure? Help your child view mistakes as chances to learn. Teach her that mistakes are accepted and expected. Help her realistically assess her performance while emphasizing her strengths. Discuss strategies that could lead to success.
- Does your child have close friends? If your child is struggling to make friends, help him develop social skills by arranging nonstressful play dates that are supervised and structured and that incorporate cooperative activities (e.g., going to the movies, making cookies, and bowling).
- How does your child respond to new challenges? Help your child develop a sense that she can affect the outcome of events in her life. Words of encouragement are important and provide energizing motivation. Children feel more effective if they think they are making a contribution. Provide your child with opportunities to make choices, solve problems, and develop responsibility (e.g., helping care of younger siblings, helping prepare meals together, and raking an elderly neighbor's leaves).
- How does your own style (e.g., personality, patience, energy level, talents) compare with your child's? Recognize any differences between your style and abilities and your child's. Take these differences into account when developing expectations for your child. Look for ways to support his unique personality.
- Are you setting reasonable or attainable expectations for your child? Unreasonable expectations can make your child feel like a failure even when she is consistently doing her best and performing at an appropriate level for her abilities. Even the expectation of "just do your best" can feel quite demanding, as few children or parents can consistently do "their best" all the time.

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