



# The Child's Self-Concept: OK or NOT OK

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## **The Child's Self-Concept Is the Way He Feels About Himself**

### **The child can feel OK or NOT OK**

A child feels good about himself (his self-concept is OK) when he sees himself as:

- Accepted by others
- Competent
- Confident
- Secure
- Loved
- Valued
- Moral
- Independent
- Accepting of himself

A child who feels good about himself is satisfied with life and thinks the world is a pretty good place to live in.

A good self-concept enables a child to accept responsibility, to achieve success in school, and to grow into a productive member of society. His view of life is, I'm OK-You're OK.

A child who does not have good feelings about himself may see himself as:

- Rejected by others
- Incompetent
- Doubted by self
- Insecure
- Unloved
- Unwanted
- Bad
- Dependent
- Dislikes self

A child who doesn't feel good about himself-his self-concept is NOT OK- is dissatisfied with life and thinks the world is not a good place to live in. He feels "I'm NOT OK."

A poor self-concept leads to difficulty in accepting responsibility, fear, apathy, anxiety, defensiveness, and lack of success in school. It may lead to juvenile delinquency and excessive use of alcohol and drugs.

### **Areas that Influence the Child's Self-Concept**

What adults do and say to the child

A child feels OK when adults gives.

- Smiles
- Pats
- Hugs
- Kind words
- Encouragement

A child feels NOT OK when adults give:

- Slaps

- Scowls
- Humiliating remarks
- Discouragement

### **Child-rearing methods used**

A child feels OK when parents are: supportive, give choices, and use democratic methods.

A child feels NOT OK when parents are too strict or too permissive.

### **What adults expect of the child**

A child feels OK when what adults expect of her is in line with her abilities.

A child feels NOT OK when adults expect too much or too little of her.

### **Special privileges, praise, and punishment given to the child**

A child feels OK when they are fair and appropriate.

A child feels NOT OK when they are unfair, too much, or too little.

### **Amount of attention given the child**

A child feels OK when her needs for love, security, and belonging are met.

A child feels NOT OK when she gets too little attention and feels neglected and unwanted.

### **Ways We Tell How Children Feel About Themselves**

Signs that the child feels OK about herself are:

- Happy facial expression
- Easy, alert body posture
- Warm voice
- Language-pleasant
- No nervous habits
- Accepts others
- Faces new situations easily
- Knows how to handle angry, unhappy feelings

### **Signs that the child feels NOT OK about himself are:**

- Sad or hostile expression
- Slumped or tense body posture
- Whiny voice
- Insulting language
- Nervous habits: hair twisting, nail biting, clothes twisting.
- Withdraws from others
- Extremely frightened of new situations
- Frequently expresses angry and unhappy feelings with aggressive acts.

### **How Can Adults Help?**

The self-concept is learned. Since it is learned, adults have the responsibility of helping children develop healthy views of

themselves. Dr. Harris said in his book, *I'm OK; You're OK*, "Fortunate are the children who are helped early in life to find they are OK by repeated exposure to situations in which they can prove, to themselves, their own worth and the worth of others."

#### **Build the child's sense of basic trust.**

Let him know that you accept, respect, and trust him and seek to earn his acceptance, respect, and trust. Adults are able to exert a positive influence on the development of the child's self-concept only if they are valued by the child.

#### **Learn why the child acts the way he does.**

Is he jealous of the new baby? Tired and irritable? Frustrated by a too difficult task? Bored?

#### **Be yourself.**

Accept your own feelings about yourself and about your child. Don't be afraid of damaging children by occasionally "losing your cool." Children can withstand some bad experiences without suffering damaging consequences to their self-concepts. However, if adults continually "lose their cool" and display negative attitudes, they need to examine their own emotional health.

#### **Express your unpleasant feelings verbally.**

Rather than bottle up feelings until they explode, tell the child how you feel. For example, say "It upsets me when you dump the box of cornflakes on the kitchen floor." However, try to express your feelings in a quiet voice. Have a "cooling off" period; wait until you have calmed down before you tell the child about how you feel. (Do not express anger; it scares the child).

#### **Accept the child's unpleasant emotions.**

The child needs to know that everyone has angry, unhappy feelings at times. We can't help how we feel, but we can help how we express our feelings. Bad feelings need not give her a concept of herself as "bad."

#### **Teach the child how to deal with angry, unhappy feelings.**

Children need to learn to express their feelings in socially acceptable ways. "Bad" feelings may be expressed through words. A child can say, "That hurts" when another child hits him. Teach him to express how he feels, not what he thinks of the other person. Help the child get rid of his "bad" feeling through vigorous activity: running, digging, pounding nails; playing in sand or water; or activities with finger paints and clay help ease tensions.

#### **Provide ways for the child to feel successful.**

Give her jobs which aren't too easy or too difficult. A three-year old can be very proud of herself when she sets the table for mother. When the child feels that she is a capable and competent person she has good feelings about herself.

#### **Respond to the child's actions immediately.**

If the child performs a job well, tell him so right away, not next week. Praise the act, not the person. Say "You certainly did a good job of setting the table," not "You are such a good boy." If the child behaves well on a trip to the grocery store, tell him so immediately. Say "You were very helpful today when we went to the grocery store." He is much more likely to repeat desired behavior if he receives immediate recognition.

#### **Teach and demonstrate respect for your own & other cultures & ethnic groups.**

Children from ethnic minorities and lower socio-economic groups, children with handicaps, and females need special attention from caring adults in order to prevent them from developing the idea that certain opportunities or activities are not open to them. Help children to feel pride in their cultural background and accept those from different backgrounds. Also, help children learn about other subcultures in our society. Unless taught otherwise, children think everybody lives just like they do. A growing esteem of others is basic to a healthy self-esteem.

#### **Give the child plenty of praise, warmth, & physical signs of affection.**

Children thrive in a climate of love. They need lots of "warm fuzzies"- pats, smiles, hugs, and praise. Feelings of acceptance and love are necessary for a healthy self-concept.

#### **Encourage exploration.**

Give the child as many different experiences as possible-visits to the grocery store, to see grandmother, to the park, to the library, to the fire station. Give him opportunities to test his body-climbing, running, jumping. The more varied a child's experience, the more opportunities he has for developing concepts of himself as a person who says "I can" rather than "I can't."

#### **Take photographs of the child.**

Let him compare his size in photographs one or two years apart.

#### **Display the child's artwork.**

Tape her picture on the refrigerator door or the kitchen wall. Let her know that you value her creations. "Feelings are built up over a period of years . . . If, on the whole, day after day and month after month, the child experiences more comfort than discomfort, more balance than imbalance, more attention than lack of it, his feelings will be in the direction of seeing himself and the world on the 'OK' side of the ledger.\*"

If all children are helped to develop a positive self-concept, the course of the world could be changed for the better.

# OK

# NOT OK



## Recommended Reading

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