

Does your self-esteem affect your children's?

by Lisa McKimm



Parents that I work with sometimes worry about their children's self esteem. Maybe the kids are scared of trying new things. Or they believe that no-one wants to be their friend. They might say negative things about themselves like "I'm just dumb".

There are lots of ways that our self esteem is built in life. What we hear from others about ourselves is an important ingredient. If parents were raised in a critical family atmosphere, it is possible that they will niggle in a critical way at their own kids - without even realising it. This is often done in the guise of 'helping the kids raise their standards'!

Unfortunately, as well meaning as this might be, it rarely achieves its goal. Have you ever been inspired by someone else's criticism of you? Probably not.

Did you ever warm towards someone who was critical of you? Probably not.

If you think that you may be operating in this way - what is this all likely to mean?

My guess is that at some stage your own self esteem was affected by criticism from adults who were influential in your life. Maybe family, maybe teachers, maybe friends. You absorbed what they had to say about you. It may still be living in every cell of your body. You may resent it, but you still accept it. It may have affected you strongly in the way you see life and your relationship to others. It may leave you feeling inadequate when you are in the company of certain people (or types of people).

If any of this resonates in a familiar way with you - the next question is "How has this affected my parenting?"

Well quite simply, we find it difficult to treat others any better than we treat ourselves. (This is not a doom and gloom prospect however - read on for some answers to this dilemma!).

If we are a perfectionist, for instance, whose best efforts are never quite good enough to be celebrated. How do you think you will handle your children's best efforts?

Quite likely, by pointing out to them where they could have done a little better. You may be thinking "Well actually I treat others a lot better than I treat myself . . . I always put the kids needs above my own". This in itself poses a problem. Firstly, you are sending a message about inequality.

That parents should come last on the list for needs being met (and in my experience, mothers are especially prone to this). Secondly, we often silently resent this low ranking on the priority list. And our reaction? We may become martyrs ("after all that I've sacrificed for you lot, this is the thanks that I get! ")

Think what this is teaching our kids (and our daughters in particular).

Awesome athletes get coaching, why shouldn't awesome parents!! Want to be an awesome parent?

Put yourself at the bottom of the list.

Stewing silently is OK.

You can always take it out on the family resentfully by letting them know about everything that it's cost you personally.

And did you ever mean to send that message? No. Absolutely not. But the trouble is that our self esteem, and our life attitudes, are contagious to those who spend a lot of time with us.

If you recognise yourself in these paragraphs - what can you do to create change that will benefit both you and your family.

Well, it's as simple (and as hard) as raising your self esteem and your place on the priority list. There are many ways that you can begin this wonderful journey of self discovery. Courses and books are a good place to start.

Spend time with positive people who treat themselves well. Remember it's contagious. It only takes one positive voice in our lives to help us on our mission.

If you are still unsure of where to start - give us a call at ParentingWorx and have a chat - we might be able to help you kick-start your journey!

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