

FROM THE PRINCIPAL'S DESK . . .

BUILDING SELF-CONFIDENCE IN KIDS

Dear Hoffman Family,

For some youngsters, the school years are a whirlwind of games, club meetings, and meeting new friends. For others, it is a time of anxiety. Worried that they might do or say something “stupid”, or feeling they have nothing to offer, these students burrow within themselves and avoid taking any risks. They don't join clubs; they don't speak up in class, and they shy away from meeting new people and challenges.

Not everyone is an extrovert, and it is not necessary to juggle a dozen different activities to be happy and well-adjusted. But if your child seems unhappy and says things like, “I'd never make the basketball team”, or “They wouldn't want me to write for the school newspaper”, then low self-confidence may be the problem.

It is not uncommon for kids of all ages to worry about whether they are as smart, athletic or “cool” as everyone else. But if they worry too much, then it may keep them from making the most of what can be a fun, exciting time of their lives.

While most people eventually outgrow shyness and become more self-confident as they get older, it would be better for them if the process started sooner. School offers many opportunities for students to learn and develop, but they must take advantage of those opportunities.

There are ways to encourage youngsters to shed their apprehensions and build self-esteem so that they feel confident enough to participate in the activities that appeal to them, make friends, and feel good about themselves. Here are some suggestions for parents:

- ***Compliment.*** Kids need to hear about it when they do something well. When your child brings home a good grade, completes a household task well, or does a good deed for someone, be sure to express praise. Making note of a youngster's strengths boosts self-esteem.
- ***Give responsibility.*** When you delegate responsibility to kids, it lets them know you trust them. Let them take charge of certain chores without constant reminders. Invite them to take part in family decisions, and let them know you value their opinions.
- ***Encourage independence.*** At this age, students should be taking more control of their own lives. They can certainly make their own decisions about clothes, how they keep their rooms (yes, even if that means messy!), and which subject is a favorite.
- ***Don't label.*** When your children display poor judgment or make mistakes, it is sometimes easy to call them “stupid” or “clumsy”, but name-calling is never a good idea and hurts self-esteem. Address the specific incident at hand, but avoid generalizing about this behavior.

- ***Communicate.*** It is important for youngsters to feel free to express their feelings and opinions without being judged. Youngsters are not always ready to share their feelings and thoughts with parents, so keeping the lines of communication open will take some patience on your part. Ask questions, but do not pry. Let them in on your feelings about things, and when they do want to talk be careful to be supportive, encouraging, and understanding. When students safely express feelings, then the world is not so intimidating.

Developing self-confidence is a long process, but can be achieved in a series of little steps every day. Gently encourage your child to try out clubs or other school activities that appeal to them, but do not insist. As students learn to grow more comfortable with themselves, they will naturally begin to venture out into the world of their own interests with a strong sense of self-confidence.

Sincerely,

Mark Walther, Principal