

Published by The American Swimming Coaches Association

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Fort Lauderdale FL 33309

Turning Obstacles Into Opportunities

Coping With Adversity is the Key

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Nothing in the world will take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent. The slogan, "Press on" has evolved and always will solve the problems of the human race. -Calvin Coolidge

Some parents think they can make sure their child has good self-esteem if they can shelter or protect her from trials, frustration, uncertainties and setbacks. The opposite is true. Their continual attempts to make their child happy and to protect her from every potential unpleasantness will most likely undermine her self-esteem. Allowing your child room to grow, make mistakes, deal with defeat and overcome problems is essential in the development of healthy self-esteem. You cannot bestow self-esteem, but you can help your child develop it by:

Helping your child set goals

Encouraging your child to challenge himself and improve his talents

Giving your child chores and responsibilities appropriate to his age and ability

Teaching your child that he is responsible for his own happiness and accomplishments

Providing academic and psychological support

By allowing your child a controlled amount of frustration, you're showing confidence in her. Of course, this doesn't mean you should leave her to deal with a hopeless situation alone. There are certainly times she will need your assistance. You can continue to be concerned and involved while encouraging independence.

Strategies to Promote Self-Confidence and Self-Esteem

In School

If you believe your child lacks self-esteem and/or self-confidence because of problems he is having at school, talk to his teacher. If he is having difficulty academically, perhaps the teacher can suggest ways to give him opportunities to improve his self-confidence. For example, he could be encouraged to work on projects that will utilize his talents. School achievement is very important in the development of self-confidence.

At Home

1. Create an environment in your home that encourages the development of self-esteem. According to Dr. Ida Greene, an expert on developing self-esteem, the ingredients of such a home are:

Express love

Encourage goal-setting
Communicate honestly
Encourage independence
Define your family's values
Create security and stability
Establish reasonable standards
Be consistent in your discipline
Create opportunities for success
Express faith in your child's abilities
Praise your child's accomplishments
Require age-appropriate responsibility
Provide emotional and academic support

If these ingredients are present in your home, your child will feel more secure, will like and respect herself, and will consider herself to be worthwhile and competent.

2. If your child's poor self-esteem is chronic, she is probably suffering from emotional problems. The reasons for these problems need to be examined in counseling or psychotherapy. According to Greene, "Serious self-esteem deficits will not disappear of their own accord. The child who dislikes herself and feels "bad" will most likely continue to feel this way throughout her life unless she receives help from a mental health professional." Academic success will not provide her much enjoyment or satisfaction. If you get help for her before her bad feelings become permanent you will give her a brighter future.

Dr. Scoresby holds a Ph.D from the University of Minnesota in Counseling Psychology and is the author of many books, including Teaching Moral Development, Focus on the Children and Something Greater than Ourselves: The Exercise of Extraordinary Leadership. He is the director of Knowledge Gain Accelerated Learning Center and president of A. Lynn Scoresby & Associates, a leadership development firm.