

Kids & Cell Phones



Unlike other parenting problems, most of us can't really think back to our own childhood to see how our parents handled this issue. After all, cell phones weren't around when most of us were kids.

For many parents, a cell phone just seems like something else that their kids will nag them about getting, such as an iPod, Xbox, or new laptop. Teens likely see the cell phone issue differently, imagining that getting a cell phone is a step towards independence and a status symbol among their friends. Cell phone companies are now marketing to younger children with colorful kid-friendly phones and easy-to-use features.

With cell phone usage growing rapidly for children and teens, we offer the following information and tips for parents:

Positive

Safety: The benefit of cell phones in emergency situations is undisputed.

Convenience: No one can argue the convenience of being able to reach your child immediately, or a child being able to reach his parent, in the case of a sudden change of plans.

Negative

Health Risks

- **Mental health:** addictive, problematic use of cell phones and found a link between low self-esteem and problem cell phone use. A study measuring the link between cell phones and mental health found that teens who used cell phones the most were more likely to be anxious and depressed.
 - **Eye strain and "digital thumb":** Just like other repetitive strain injuries that can result from computer use and other repetitive tasks, these conditions can result from focusing continually on a small screen and typing on small buttons.
 - **Bacteria:** Because of the close proximity to the mouth where germs can be passed from breathing, coughing and sneezing, most cell phones are crawling with bacteria. Additionally, many people use their phone everywhere, even in the bathroom.
- Brain tumors:** While some research investigating the effects of electromagnetic radiation from cell phones in close proximity to the body have found statistical associations, other studies have found no increased risk.

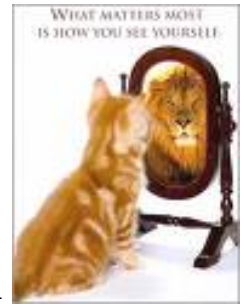
Dependence: A study shows that the more friends a teen has, the more likely they are to feel dependent on their phone and let calls or text messages interfere with their daily schedule.

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

- **Discuss your child's motivations for having a cell phone:** Talking about its use for safety rather than as a status symbol or way to fit in can be important. It may not only cut down on your teens airtime minutes, but it could initiate a conversation about his or her life, for example, feelings of anxiety, loneliness, and who they feel they need to be talking to — and when and why.
- **Develop a set of rules and responsibilities as a cell phone user:** In providing your child with a cell phone, you have the right to set the rules for its use: "Always answer calls from parents immediately." "Always identify where and with whom you are."
- **Discuss appropriate circumstances, places and uses for cell phones with your child:** Talking in low voice in public, etc.
- **Establish rules around cell phone use at night:** Require your children to turn cell phones off at night and keep them in a common area rather than allowing them to take them into their rooms, where they can talk or text message late into the night.
- **Teach your kids to only answer calls or view text messages from people they know.**
- **Help your kids save money:** Consider purchasing a pre-paid plan with a limited number of minutes for your teens, and remind them to "budget" their minutes.

Healthy self-esteem is a child's armor against the challenges of the world. Kids who feel good about themselves seem to have an easier time handling conflicts and resisting negative pressures. They tend to smile more readily and enjoy life. These kids are realistic and generally optimistic.

In contrast, for children who have low self-esteem, challenges can become sources of major anxiety and frustration. Children who think poorly of themselves have a hard time finding solutions to problems. If they are plagued by self-critical thoughts, such as "I'm no good" or "I can't do anything right," they may become passive, withdrawn, or depressed. Faced with a new challenge, their immediate response is "I can't." Read on to discover the important role you can play in promoting healthy self-esteem in your child.



What Is Self-Esteem?

Self-esteem is the collection of beliefs or feelings that we have about ourselves, or our "self-perceptions." How we define ourselves influences our motivations, attitudes, and behaviors and affects our emotional adjustment.

Patterns of self-esteem start very early in life. For example, when a baby or toddler reaches a milestone, he or she experiences a sense of accomplishment that bolsters self-esteem. Learning to roll over after dozens of unsuccessful attempts or finally mastering getting the spoon into his or her mouth every time he or she eats are experiences that teach a young child a "can do" attitude. The concept of success following persistence starts early.

As a child tries, fails, tries again, fails again, and then finally succeeds, he or she is developing ideas about his or her own capabilities. At the same time, he or she is creating a self-concept based on interactions with other people. This is why parental involvement is key to helping a child form accurate, healthy self-perceptions.

Self-esteem can also be defined as the combination of feelings of capability with feelings of being loved. A child who is happy with an achievement but does not feel loved may eventually experience low self-esteem. Likewise, a child who feels loved but is hesitant about his or her own abilities can also end up with a low self-esteem. Healthy self-esteem results when the right balance is attained.

Signs of Unhealthy and Healthy Self-Esteem

Self-esteem fluctuates as a child grows. It is frequently by a child's experiences and new perceptions. It helps healthy and unhealthy self-esteem.



changed and fine-tuned, because it is affected for parents to be aware of the signs of both

A child who has low self-esteem may not want to try new things. He or she may frequently speak negatively about his or herself, saying such things as, "I'm stupid," "I'll never learn how to do this," or "What's the point? Nobody cares about me anyway." The child may exhibit a low tolerance for frustration, giving up easily or waiting for somebody else to take over. Children with low self-esteem tend to be overly critical of and easily disappointed in themselves. Kids with low self-esteem see temporary setbacks as permanent, intolerable conditions. A sense of pessimism predominates. A child who has healthy self-esteem tends to enjoy interacting with others. He or she is comfortable in social settings

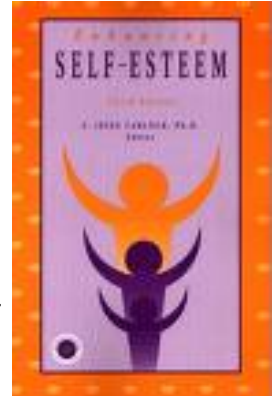


and enjoys group activities as well as independent pursuits. When challenges arise, he or she is able to work toward finding solutions. He or she voices discontent without belittling herself or others. For example, rather than saying, "I'm an idiot," a child with healthy self-esteem says, "I don't understand this." He or she knows his or her strengths and weaknesses, and accepts them. A sense of optimism prevails.

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO TO HELP

How can a parent help to foster healthy self-esteem in a child? Here are some tips that can make a big difference:

- **Watch what you say.** Children are very sensitive to parents words. Remember to praise your child not only for a job well done, but also for effort. But be truthful. Reward effort and completion instead of outcome.
- **Be a positive role model.** If you are excessively harsh on yourself, pessimistic, or unrealistic about your abilities and limitations, your child may eventually mirror you. Nurture your own self-esteem, and your child will have a great role model.
- **Identify and redirect your child's inaccurate beliefs.** It's important for parents to identify kids' irrational beliefs about themselves, whether they are about perfection, attractiveness, ability, or anything else. Helping your child set more accurate standards and be more realistic in evaluating himself or herself will help your child have a more healthy self-concept. Inaccurate perceptions of self can take root and become reality to a child. For example, a child who does very well in school but struggles with math may say, *I can't do math. I'm a bad student.* Not only is this a false generalization, it's also a belief that will set your child up for failure. Encourage your child to see the situation in its true light. A helpful response might be: *You are a good student. You do great in school. Math is just a subject that you need to spend more time on. We'll work on it together.*
- **Be spontaneous and affectionate with your child.** Your love will go a long way to boost your child's self-esteem. Give your child hugs. Tell your child you're proud of him or her. Leave a note in your child's lunch box that reads, *I think you're terrific!* Give praise frequently and honestly, without overdoing it. Kids can tell whether something comes from the heart.
- **Give positive, accurate feedback.** A comment such as, *You always work yourself up into such a frenzy!* will cause a child to start believing he or she has no control over his or her outbursts. A better statement is, *You were really mad at your brother. But I appreciate that you didn't yell at him or hit him.* This acknowledges your child's feelings and rewards the choice that your child made, encouraging your child to make the right choice again next time.
- **Create a safe, nurturing home environment.** A child who does not feel safe or is being abused at home will suffer immensely from low self-esteem. A child who is exposed to parents who fight and argue repeatedly may become depressed and withdrawn. Always remember to respect your child.
- **Make your home a safe haven for your family.** Watch for signs of abuse by others, problems in school, trouble with peers, and other potential factors that may affect your child's self-esteem. Deal with these issues sensitively but swiftly.
- **Help your child become involved in constructive experiences.** Activities that encourage cooperation rather than competition are especially helpful in fostering self-esteem. For example, mentoring programs in which an older child helps a younger one learn to read can do wonders for both children.



THE W.I.S.E. WAY TO RAISE KIDS

Anytime you need to talk to your son or daughter about important issues, you want to be prepared. Here are four tips that are easy to remember because they spell **WISE**.

"W" IS FOR WELCOME. No one enjoys dinners, activities, or conversations that are tense. Your son or daughter needs to feel your love and to know that you care and look forward to talking to him or her. They need to feel secure talking to you. Most importantly, your child is more likely to talk and listen to you if neither of you is angry or upset.

"I" IS FOR INTEREST. Show your interest by asking questions in a comfortable way. Adults generally introduce topics gently when they are talking to other adults but sometimes aren't so gentle with their own children.

Here are some suggestions for how to bring up tough topics:

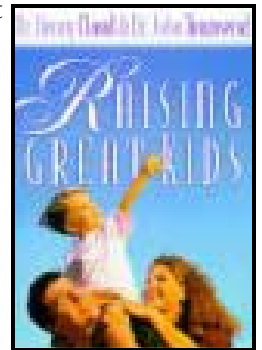
- Start with a general question or observation.
- Let your child be the expert on his or her world.
- Ask about peer pressure.
- Ask how you can help.

"S" IS FOR SUPPORT GOOD GOALS. When your son or daughter has goals for the future, he or she is more likely to make good choices. Do you know what your children, pre-teens, or teens' goals are? What do they hope to accomplish in the coming year? When they are an adult? Ask them about their goals for jobs in the future and what their plans are to get ready for them. Most importantly, listen carefully to your son or daughter.

Help your child to develop the values of honesty, responsibility, and caring. Remember, values about education, marriage, and trust are more easily "caught" than "taught." You and your behavior are the most valuable "values" educator!

"E" IS FOR ENCOURAGE, EDUCATE, EMPOWER AND EXPECT. Educate and encourage your son or daughter to make healthy decisions. Whatever the topic is, don't think that you need to know all the answers. Just be honest when you don't and offer to help find out the facts for them.

EFFECTIVE PARENTS NOT ONLY TEACH AND ENCOURAGE THEIR CHILDREN, BUT THEY ALSO SET HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR THEM AND CLEARLY COMMUNICATE THOSE EXPECTATIONS.



Our Purpose

Understanding how stressful life is and living in a demanding community, we offer busy parents some effective tips to help your children succeed in school and life. On your behalf, we search for and provide you with the most practical ideas to promote academic success, effective parenting, a solid home-and-school partnership, healthy habits, and positive character traits.

You might find these sites useful:

<http://childparenting.about.com/od/selfesteem/ht/htkidsestee.htm>
<http://www.emf-health.com/children.htm>
www.mercola.com/2005/apr/27/cell_phones.htm

Omneya ElKhatib - Counseling Supervisor