

Building confidence in children

Having confidence can motivate children to engage in a wide range of experiences, support their ability to build positive relationships, and better equip them to navigate life's challenges.

How does confidence develop?

From a young age, infants and young children are curious about the world and use a variety of ways to explore and understand their surroundings.

Toddlers and preschoolers often express their curiosity by asking "why" questions or exploring the world in their own unique way.

From their repeated experiences of seeing their actions affect their world and the people in it, young children can begin to see themselves as capable and having agency and control. This can help them feel good about themselves and build their self-confidence.

Varied expectations

Children can experience a variety of expectations and feelings when starting school. Some may feel confident and excited while others may experience uncertainty or concern, or it might be a mixture.

When children notice how they do things compared to others, their view of their own abilities can change – they learn what their challenges and strengths are. They also see how other children and educators respond to what they do. These experiences help shape their understanding of their abilities and influence their confidence regarding new challenges. This confidence in their abilities can encourage them to try new things, even in situations where they may feel uncertain.

What can educators do to help?

Educators' response

The way adults respond to children in many and varied situations can help form their template for working through life's ups and downs.

When significant adults nurture the natural curiosity of young children, and demonstrate patience and interest, it can help strengthen their sense of self. In new settings, children who are suddenly less sure of themselves may need extra support and encouragement to build the confidence they can take with them into adolescence.

Children can feel more confident when they have regular opportunities to overcome challenges and practise new skills in safe and supportive environments.

It's important to remember that children come from different backgrounds and their experiences with building confidence can vary. Understanding each child's unique cultural or personal context can help ensure they feel supported in ways that work best for them.

Trying new things

Building children's confidence helps them try new things. It allows them to develop social and emotional skills and tackle new tasks – even when they might be daunting or completely new. There are many ways that you can support children's developing confidence and sense of self such as:

- giving regular encouragement and praise
- understanding and supporting motivation

- supporting self-esteem and optimism
- encouraging them to solve problems and work through challenges.

Give regular encouragement and praise

Praise is most effective when you're mindful of how and when you use it. When praising children, focus on their efforts and achievements.

Specific praise that acknowledges you've noticed their efforts and problem-solving processes can enhance children's learning and motivation. It teaches them what they're doing well. For example, you might say:

- "You put away your toys so nicely."
- "I noticed you focusing on your project even though it seemed to get hard."
- "You've used so many bright colours in your painting."

Children can then use this learning when they have similar experiences in the future.

It's important to tailor praise to each child's needs. Some children may respond differently to certain types of encouragement, so be mindful of what works best for them.

Understand motivation

Motivation helps children feel a sense of control over what they're doing and then they're more likely to take on new challenges. Children's confidence can grow when they are motivated and working towards achieving their self-determined plan or goal.

Children's motivation can also vary depending on what they're doing, their level of interest and how they're feeling. Like adults, they can be motivated to do some activities more than others. Sometimes children can be less motivated because they feel tired or unwell or because they find it difficult to focus. Motivation is complex and can be influenced by many factors.

Supporting children's motivation

- Provide an inviting and safe environment that can be explored in the presence of engaged, caring and trusted adults.
- Scaffold children's learning and gradually reduce involvement over time.
- Ask children questions, talk them through activities, and notice their efforts.

Remember, motivation doesn't always need to be facilitated by adults – children can be self-motivated as well as very good at motivating each other.

Support self-esteem and optimism

Self-esteem is an important part of confidence

Having good self-esteem means children are accepting and feeling positive about themselves.

Confidence isn't just an individual feeling good but also knowing their strengths. Things like:

- believing that if you try, you are working towards success
- finding positive ways to cope with challenges that encourage having another go
- enjoying learning for its own sake
- making sure that goals are achievable by breaking down large tasks or responsibilities into small steps
- knowing you can ask for help if you need it.

Encourage working through challenges

No one achieves their goals all the time – and this can help us grow

You can build children's ability to work through challenges when you:

- respond empathetically and with encouragement
- help children focus on what they can change to make things better, instead of thinking that the situation is unchangeable or taking it personally

- challenge “I can’t” thinking by showing and saying you believe in them and reminding them of what they’ve achieved.

Optimism recognises what has been achieved more than what’s lacking. It looks at the glass as half-full rather than half-empty. Adults can help children focus on their efforts and on achieving personal goals as a good way to acknowledge growth and progress.

Support children’s confidence

Confidence can improve through building on small successes. You support children when you:

- explain that skills develop with practice
- remind them of something they couldn’t do before but now can
- scaffold their learning and offer support without taking over
- consider children’s views and ideas on their activities and their environment.
- encourage them to persist if they don’t succeed straight away
- praise effort, persistence and individual effort - focus on the child’s effort rather than the outcome
- arrange safe, inclusive and interesting spaces where they’re free to explore, participate and see the effects of their actions
- ensure activities and experiences are welcoming and accessible for all children
- answer children’s questions appropriately – sometimes you won’t know the answer, and that’s OK
- ask them questions to help them solve problems and promote further learning
- help them experience learning as fun
- continue learning, have team discussions, plan actions or reflect on practice in your learning community.

- use the [Disability Inclusion Guide](#) as a tool to reflect on your own and your teams engagement and practices.

Be You Professional Learning

Learn more about providing support for children, young people and their families, by helping them access information and internal and external supports, in the Provide module of the [Early Support Domain](#).

Bibliography

Visit [Building confidence in children](#) for a list of references for this Fact Sheet.

External links

Raising Children Network – [About self-esteem: children 1-8 years / Praise, encouragement and rewards](#) / [Confidence in teenagers](#)

ReachOut – [How to build self-confidence](#)

