

# How Do We Teach Kids To Love Themselves?



Millions of children, at any given moment, feel unloved – by others and by themselves. Too many feel alone, misunderstood, unappreciated, even worthless. How can we turn this around and empower our youth to feel self-love?

Love starts at home. When a loving environment exists, it nurtures love in others. When children love themselves, they are in a better position to love others. Where there's more love, there is less bullying.

Let's first define self-love. This means to love yourself unconditionally, whether you succeed or fail at a goal, whether someone praises or criticizes you, and whether you look like a movie star or not. It does not matter how smart you are, or if you are funny, creative, or athletic – or none of the above: Love yourself!

Adults, particularly parents, guardians, childcare providers, and teachers, must model, in words and deeds, one who is loving and shows a healthy dose of self-love. They are the self-love influencers for the youngest generation.

## **Self-loving adults will:**

- Not shame others over their looks, body size, finances, gender, race, religion, or abilities.
- Avoid employing self-deprecating humor or negative self-talk.
- Be kind to others – what you put into the world comes back to you.
- Expose themselves to positive people, less competitive environments, and places that accept them as they are.

- Not believe in being perfect or demanding of others to meet unrealistic ideals.
- Know it is okay to set goals and reach high, but not to feel afraid to fail.
- Never compare themselves to others, particularly in a negative way.
- Know that everyone makes mistakes – that is how we grow.
- Believe if they don't fail sometimes that they didn't try new things or reach far enough.

We cannot only live and model self-love, but we can espouse it and encourage it in our children and others. In raising three young children, I strive to establish healthy habits for them. I will educate, inspire, and support their pursuits. But I will also allow them to fail. They need to make choices, take action, and reflect on their outcome. Then they need to know they are loved no matter the results.

**Parents, educators, and coaches should:**

- Help kids make their own choices and show them how to evaluate opportunities and understand risks.
- Reinforce that kids should not fear failure, reassure them that they will still be liked and loved regardless.
- Be aware of when a child struggles, complains, seems gun shy, or asks questions that indicate a problem.
- Let kids talk and express themselves without interruption or judgment.
- Invite kids to resolve their own problems.
- Teach them empathy and sympathy. By valuing others, we can see value in ourselves.
- Be a shoulder to cry on, a sounding board to air complaints, and a repository for their sharing of feelings.
- Highlight a child's abilities and strengths – and reassure them that they have what it takes.
- Avoid dishing out harsh criticism.
- Praise one's effort, not just a result. But do not overpraise.
- Encourage kids to think and do for themselves.
- Avoid doing things for their kids. Instead, provide opportunity for them to take action. Let them try – and fail sometimes. Show them what to do, explain it, and answer questions. Then let them try their hand at the task.

One other way to inspire self-love in others is to expose them to positive, empowering messages. I wrote a best-selling children's book, *Ack! The Nantucket Duckling*, because I wanted young kids to celebrate unconditional love and self-acceptance.

In the colorful story, Ack, a duck with an unusual looking and sounding beak, is transformed from being timid and self-doubting to a courageous, heart-warming hero who encourages others to escape the competitive trap of comparison and rejoice in the freedom of simply being who we are.

Love yourself. Love your kids. Help them to love themselves and others.

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