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BACKGROUND: Self-esteem develops from a young age through experiences that help children feel capable, confident, accepted, and willing to try new things (Fuchs-Beauchamp, 1996). Research shows that children who experience many positive interactions with caregivers tend to have high levels of self-esteem and academic achievement (Haney & Durlak, 1998). In order to foster high self-esteem, caregivers can model certain behaviors, praise efforts rather than outcomes, and offer appropriate and achievable challenges.

Strategies to foster self-esteem

- Be *present and available* to support children and provide a sense of security.
- Give children opportunities to take appropriate *risks* to build their skills and develop competence.
- Allow children to make their own *choices*, and to say “no” to things they do not want to do.
- Encourage children to be *persistent* and learn from failure; praise their *effort*.
- Consider children’s *temperaments* and give them adequate time to *observe* and feel comfortable.

Communicate and model self-esteem

- Use a *soft tone* and focus on what children are doing well.
- Offer children appropriate and *positive phrases* to express success and frustration.
- Provide *specific encouragement* to highlight what the child is doing well.
- Model *positive interactions* with other children and adults, as well as how to use *new materials*.

APPLICATION:

*Blaise, a three-year-old, whines and whimpers as she struggles to put on dress-up shoes. Her teacher, Mrs. A, hears her and offers support. In a **soft and nurturing tone**, Mrs. A. asks, “Blaise you sound frustrated, do you need help?” Blaise holds up the shoes and says, “Shoes, feet, please.” Mrs. A. offers a silly **choice**, “Do I put these shoes on my feet or your feet?” Blaise smiles and points to her own feet. Mrs. A. states, “I’ll try and then you try.” She describes her steps as she goes, then offers Blaise a shoe. As Blaise tries to put it on, Mrs. A. **encourages her effort**, stating, “You can do it! I see you pushing so hard to get the shoe over your toes.” Blaise tries a few more times and then Mrs. A. offers hand-over-hand support. Blaise shouts, “Did it!”*

*During pick-up, Mrs. A tells Blaise’s mother about her persistence. Blaise’s mother is happy to hear of her success but expresses concern about Blaise’s confidence in unfamiliar settings. Mrs. A. suggests some ways to help Blaise feel more confident in new spaces or when **taking new risks**. For example, be **available** to help Blaise pour her own milk. If she has a spill, **model** how to clean the spill and then allow her to do it **independently**. Mrs. A. also explains that children’s **temperaments** influence how they perceive the world around them. If Blaise is slow to warm up in new spaces, allow her time to **observe** and then make a choice if she wants to join.*

*The next morning, Blaise’s mom gives her extra time to put on her shoes independently and offers her a **choice** between two favorite pairs. Although Blaise places her shoes on the opposite feet, her mom offers her **authentic praise** for working so hard to put them on all by herself. Giving Blaise extra time to work on her shoes and not rush her supported her confidence in her ability to learn a new skill.*

TO LEARN MORE:

[Building children's self-esteem](#)

[Why self-esteem matters](#)

REFERENCES:

- Fuchs-Beauchamp, K.D. (1996). Preschoolers’ inferred self-esteem: The Behavioral Rating Scale of Presented Self-Esteem in Young Children. *The Journal of Genetic Psychology, 157*(2), 204-210.
- Haney, P. & Durlak, J.A. (1998). Changing self-esteem in children and adolescents: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology, 27*(4), 423-433.