

# Self-confidence: Does your child suffer from not enough or too much?

This 4-step formula can help adults instill healthy self-assurance in kids.

by: [S. Michele Fry](#) | February 7, 2019



Children are born confident — or not. Some research suggests that [confidence is genetic](#), that children are born predisposed to be self-confident or timid and meek. Luckily, just because it's in the genes doesn't mean it's fixed and unchangeable. We can train our kids to be sure of themselves. We can grow and nurture the seeds of self-assurance. And it's important to do so.

Confidence, trusting in your own abilities, qualities, and judgment, may be at the core of perseverance, courage, and self-reliance. [Albert Bandura, the foremost expert on self-confidence](#) — also known as self-efficacy — says it can have an impact on everything, from people's moods to their actions and motivation.

[Maureen Healy, emotional health and parenting expert](#), says “confidence is the foundation for all well-being; without it so many other things just won't work.”

Self-confidence boosts school performance, even more than IQ. Confident children jump at trying new things and don't see failure as a reason to stop. They have a “try, try again” mentality. They tend to be optimistic, and their confidence catapults hopefulness, making them believe they can achieve their goals. Confidence can also give people a social edge because they believe they have something to contribute.

It can also be a double-edged sword. Too much confidence can lead kids toward delusions of grandeur and a life of disappointments. Want to build your children's confidence without pumping up their ego?

# Building healthy self-confidence

To foster a healthy sense of self-confidence focus on these four activities identified by Bandura, a psychology professor emeritus at Stanford University. He defines self-efficacy as the ability to define a goal, persevere, and see oneself as capable of taking the actions required to make it happen. (All the good parts of confidence.) The path to self-efficacy includes mastery experiences, social modeling, positive reinforcement, and positive attitude.

**1. Mastery experience** refers to performing a task successfully and attributing the success to efforts. It's not luck or genetics. In order to help kids develop mastery, Healy, author of *Growing Happy Kids: How to Foster Inner Confidence, Success, and Happiness*, recommends giving him to ways to get really good at something — whether its' school, sports, or drawing quietly at home. That means maintaining high expectations and teaching kids the value of hard work and practice.

Another way to cultivate mastery experience is Healy's recommendation to extend trust to your children. For instance, providing your child with chores and responsibilities around the house shows trust. And it doesn't hurt to say "I trust you" whether it's to feed the dog twice a day or to scramble the eggs. Give them tasks within reason, based on their age and skill level. "They still need your guidance, and they still need to be supervised. They still need to be taught," Healy says. You don't put eggs in front of your 5-year-old who has never cracked an egg, never turned on the stove, and never paid attention to you do it, and say make breakfast for the family, but you do want kids to be allowed to take chances and try new things.

**2. Social modeling** is a powerful conscious and unconscious force in shaping children's identities. Children take notice when a person similar to them negotiates obstacles and succeeds. It's the "if she can do it, so can I" syndrome. They may even derive inspiration from a fictional or historical character. Role models help keep us going despite first-attempt flops. Healy recommends that parents tell stories from their own lives to show how they got through hard times. Or share life stories of people such as [Thomas Edison](#) and [Michael Jordan](#) who failed many times but kept trying. Role models offer "concrete evidence that that's how [life] works," Healy says. "It creates a culture of learning." She also reminds parents that they are models and must project confidence as people and parents. Children copy their parents.

**3. Positive reinforcement** refers to encouragement from people you trust or look up to. Words have enormous power. Healy says often just little words empower kids' dreams — or wound their spirit. "I am a firm believer that children digest the words and feelings all around them like food," she says. The right message can remind kids they are up for a challenge, have the skills to succeed, and can handle a tough situation. It's not flattery. It's not about admiring their inborn skills, such as beauty, smarts, or athleticism. It's encouraging their dreams and plans.

The best way to fuel those big dreams? Praise your child based on effort, by saying things like: "Good job studying so diligently for the test. You earned that A-." "You're a really

valuable asset to the team because you've practiced your free throws so much." What you're telling them is "If you perfected your free-throw, then you can focus on learning the violin or long division"...or whatever your child's next big challenge will be.

**4. Positive attitude** exudes from those with confidence. Although positivity, like [self-confidence](#), [may be genetic](#), it also can be instilled. Learning to minimize stress and elevate mood when facing difficult or challenging tasks can improve a person's sense of self-efficacy, Bandura says. A good mood builds perceptions of confidence and negative emotions weaken them. *Positivity helps people see more options, even when faced with a problem, and gives them the belief that they will cope and triumph. That optimism boosts self-confidence. (And being self-confident boosts a person's mood. It's a virtuous circle.)*

## Overconfidence — too much of a good thing

A vicious circle can grow if confidence gets out of balance. Yes, you can have too much of a good thing. Overconfidence, often resulting from praising the wrong thing, can be detrimental. It causes youths and adults alike to misjudge their abilities, not try as hard at many tasks, and jump into riskier situations with less thought. It leads them to misjudge their capabilities and often drives them to believe they are superior to others.

Overconfidence can reduce social acceptance. Who wants to hang out with an egomaniac? However, the child may never recognize it, thinking everyone loves him. A parent doesn't help the problem by dismissing other children's criticism with something like "they're just jealous." Also, because the overconfident person misjudges her abilities, experience teaches others not to trust her.

Rearing confident children without pushing them into overconfidence is a tricky balance beam to walk. You have to be sensitively honest and give constructive critiques when your child does not excel at something. Affirm the good things they do without worshiping them for every fart joke, misplayed note, or scribbled drawing. And when in doubt, praise them for their hard work, not their talent.

As tricky as it is, parents or adults can effectively boost their children's confidence by trusting, believing, listening, and supporting their child without coddling or praising them excessively. As Healy says, raising a self-confident child is a gradual process, step-by-step, day-by-day.