

Effective Strategies to Boost Teen Confidence

Raising Confident Teens

One of the core ingredients our teens need to become successful adults is confidence. Confidence enables them to think outside-the-box and grab the opportunities before them. Teens with confidence may find it easier to rebound from failure, seeing it as an opportunity for growth rather than a catastrophe. Confidence may contribute to their belief that they will ultimately recover from even the greatest challenges.

Confidence is not something we can give to our children; but, we can nurture it in them. We do this by authentically noticing their efforts and supporting their development of skills. By that, we mean we don't build confidence by showering our teens with unearned praise. Rather, confidence is rooted in competence.

But we also support our adolescents' confidence by standing beside them as they navigate challenges. Our unwavering presence allows our teens to maintain their confidence, even if other forces in their life are discouraging.

The 7 Cs of Resilience

Confidence, along with [competence](#), [connection](#), [contribution](#), [character](#), [coping](#), and [control](#), make up the [7 C's of Resilience](#). This model, as described in [Building Resilience in Children and Teens](#), includes elements [essential](#) for raising successful young people prepared to develop to their very best selves. Thinking about resilience in this way offers caring adults a shared language in order to work toward raising young people who will thrive during both good and bad times.

These qualities do not stand alone — they are interrelated and build upon each other. Here at the Center for Parent and Teen Communication (CPTC) we aim to empower parents and caring adults to support the development of the 7 Cs in all children. Read on to learn how you can build your teen's confidence.

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The Roots of Confidence

Temperament plays a role in how much natural confidence we have. Some people are just more cautious. They prefer to dip their toes in the water, and watch others dive in. We mustn't try to change our children's basic temperament — it's not possible and it can lead them to believe that we do not think they are good enough just as they are. The good news is ALL people can gain confidence. Confidence is rooted in developing competencies — or skills — and through gaining experience. I don't know if I can. I don't know if I can. I can!

We build our adolescent's confidence by noticing what they are doing well. Each success creates a ripple of potentially new opportunities for continued growth.

We cannot instill confidence acting like cheerleaders from the sidelines. It is something teens must gain on their own. However, we can recognize and notice those things worthy of building confidence. Even cautious teens will appreciate being noticed for what they are doing well. They will especially appreciate recognition of their developing skills.

These developing skills can help them gain the confidence to try new things and build trust in their abilities to make sound choices. As they manage challenges they will learn they can succeed even when life is tough. Our role as parents is both to notice their successes and to sometimes get out of the

way so they can learn how much they can handle on their own. When they deal with things they didn't think possible at first . . . they will have earned real confidence.

Authentic Self-Esteem

Confidence is not the same thing as feel-good self-esteem. For many years, the self-esteem movement urged adults to build children's self-esteem as if it were a quality that could be bestowed rather than earned. We know, largely through the [Mindset work of Dr. Carol Dweck](#), that the self-esteem movement backfired. Showering unearned praise on children created an anxious generation that feared failure and loathed thinking creatively. Quite the opposite of having confidence.

While we want young people to have high self-esteem, it must be earned. In simplest terms, build your child's confidence by letting them know that their actions led to an outcome. This also helps them understand they have control.

Make the shift from "You are _____" to "You did _____ and therefore _____ happened." For example, rather than saying "You are so good at math," say "You studied really hard and it paid off."

When young people master a task, they believe in their abilities, build confidence and earn authentic self-esteem.

Focus on What's Been Done Right

Teens receive evaluations from many places. Grades from school. Scores from sports events. Peer judgement. Many adults focus primarily on adolescent risk-taking, faults, or mistaken behaviors. They may do this with good intentions, but focusing on problems can be undermining and generate powerlessness.

We cannot shield our teens from all of the messages that may lower their confidence, but we can be a protective force that emphasizes their abilities. Young people will make mistakes. But if we focus only on what they have done wrong, it's as if we're attaching weights to their legs that make it harder for them to rise. When we address problems we must also recognize their strengths. This energizes our tweens and teens to turn failure into a learning experience from which they will grow.

Catch Them Being Good

We made a big deal of every developmental milestone and minor accomplishment in our young children. "Ooh, you tied your shoes! You're such a big girl!" Catching young children being good works because of how deeply they want to please us. Fast-forward to adolescence and we tend to shift focus onto what they are not doing.

What happened? Our approval is just as important to our teens as it was to our toddlers. We should still try to catch them being good by noticing their unprompted acts of kindness and efforts to master the world. A few words of appreciation and well-earned praise can build and reinforce confidence.

Set Reasonable Expectations

Young people really do respond to our expectations. So we must hold expectations high — but realistic. You know all that is right and good about your child — expect to see those character strengths within them. That is [one of the most protective forces](#) in your teen's life.

Continue to demand effort, but keep your expectations about the results reasonable. People are uneven. We want our teens to find their unique strengths so they learn where to focus their energies. By not accepting their unevenness, we set them up to lose confidence. We should accept the results when our teens demonstrate real effort.

You may be thinking, “Don’t I have to set the bar high?” You want to set that bar within your teens’ reach, if they just stretch a bit. Then, they will gain the confidence to meet high standards. If you set the bar too high, they may fail or feel like they have failed you. And this can’t be about you. If you set the bar too low, they will think you don’t know their capabilities.

The bar is uneven. For some areas — perhaps science or lacrosse — the bar can be quite high. For others — perhaps history or band — it cannot be set so high. So where do you set the bar? Listen to the experts in your teen’s life. The teachers and coaches. And most importantly — listen to your teens. They’ll know what they can handle if given the opportunity to be honest about their unevenness. They’ll become more self-aware. They’ll gain confidence to take chances and know they can recover from setbacks.

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Nurture Teen Confidence to Build Resilience

Support adolescents to gain the protection that comes from confidence.