



Daring to Be, Daring to Become:

FOSTERING SELF-CONFIDENCE

by Amelie Yan-Gouiffes

This summer, I enjoyed the end-of-year school performance of my little one, Louis-Maddox, who was finishing K2. I was very happy my work schedule left me able to attend, so I could watch these talented students and support my son. But on that June day, I wasn't just a spectator or cheering parent in the crowd: I was a student, too.

The show was beautifully organized and colorful, with a wide variety of dancing styles — Turkish, country-western, traditional Filipino, to name a couple — and students from each grade had their own scenes.

As I watched, I noticed that the youngest kids exuded confidence. Despite their cognitive youth, with

some as young as three years old, they followed their prepared steps with ease and self-assurance. They seemed to really enjoy the performance. It's true that not all of the preschoolers were confident; I could observe differences in personalities. But, in the plays with older children, there was a notable increase in caution.

When the older children danced, they did so with limited freedom and fluidity. Aside from a few natural born performers, some children were frozen in fear. On the whole, these older students seemed to be less daring than their younger peers.

I wondered: What happened between the ages of 3 and 6 years that could explain a drop in the students'

confidence levels? As I thought about the potential explanations, it occurred to me that this was not just a matter of self-esteem, but one of expectations.

LESSONS IN SELF-CONFIDENCE

My own journey toward becoming self-confident was a long and bumpy one that took me decades. Working on my self-confidence involved, in part, making sure that what I did, said, and how I acted were founded on my purpose and what I really believed in, not on the need to please others — not even my own parents.

The day I realized I'd overcome my struggle with confidence wasn't too

long ago: In 2014, during a meditation retreat in Dubai, we were doing some group exercises on releasing the patterns we did not want anymore in our lives. I told the group that I wanted to release my lack of self-confidence, which surprised my friend Michelle who said: "You, Amelie? Lack of confidence?"

At first, I felt a bit upset that she would not believe me. But then I asked myself if I really still did lack confidence, and I realized that I was not doing bad at all! It had been such a long journey for me that I had just gotten used to the *idea* that I was not confident. Dear reader, what is your honest feedback about your confidence?

THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM

Confidence builds up during childhood; during this time, it can get breached at home, at school, or in the community.

From an early age, children receive messages about the way they are expected to be. They hear adults say things like, "Mummy feels so sad because you ..." or, "Do this-or-that to make Daddy happy."

Of course, the socialization children undergo is necessary so that they learn about structure, performance and integration. As a parent, it's not easy to find balance between giving guidelines and values to our children and formatting them to "please" the rest of the world. To strike this balance, though, means children will be able to be who they are, so they can dance with joy and

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freedom and place their feet firmly wherever they may go.

There is no magical recipe, but when we parents work on our own confidence, positive change happens! When a child sees parents daring to be, it is very likely the child will dare to become. Parents have a big role, but let us not forget that children are individual beings. While we can inspire, influence and teach, the personality of the child is not our exclusive production or responsibility.

DEFINING SELF-CONFIDENCE

Self-confidence means daring to be who you are, with full authenticity. When you are truly living in accordance with your values, goals and dreams, you can shine your strongest light, both in your heart and out into the world to serve others.

BUILDING UP CONFIDENCE AT HOME

For families, especially those with young kids, I like the following exercise for building confidence:

Put a large piece of paper on the wall, on which each member of the family has his or her objective for the week, in terms of a daily habit to undertake or work on. For example, "Say something nice to my brother," or "Dedicate 30 minutes to meditation," or "Spend one hour with no electronic devices."

Every evening as a family, review what each family member did or did

not do, and put a sticker up when there is an accomplishment. The rule is that there is *no judgment*. Each person only comments about his or her own achievement. If someone is not able to make something happen, the others can ask how they can be of support to help.

When you know what your strengths and skills are, and when you have defined your own objectives and clarified your purpose, you exist outside the eyes and the judgment of others. You do not seek acceptance and love of others to feel good and to feel worthy. Of course we all like to be loved and accepted, but when it becomes a purpose, it becomes our nightmare.

When we teach our children to appreciate themselves and to see who they are, when we help them to set up objectives and to be the leaders of their lives, we help our children to step into their power and claim their confidence.

SIGNS OF SELF-CONFIDENCE

- ➔ A self-confident person's objective is not focused on people-pleasing or following trends but on being his or her authentic self.
- ➔ Criticism may cause an effect but won't lead to collapse under the weight and pressure of critique. Instead, he or she takes relevant feedback into consideration and releases whatever is toxic.
- ➔ He or she does not engage in self-comparison, neither with arrogance nor with self-deprecation.
- ➔ A self-confident person recognizes, appreciates and smiles at the beauty in others.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Amelie Yan-Gouiffes's job and passion is inner diamond mining. She is a motivational speaker and public speaking coach who empowers people to uncover their inner diamonds and unleash their full potential through her "Be and Become[®]" programs. To learn more about personal and professional development through public speaking, contact Amelie on www.ameliespeaks.com.