

RAISING KIDS IN A CONFUSING TIME

I recently read a great article from Dr. Henry Cloud entitled, ***Self-Esteem is Not the Most Important Thing to Build in Your Child***

With so many conflicting theories about raising kids this article gives a great starting place to build on.

Pastor Scott

Self-esteem is a sensitive topic for parents, and they're careful to build it into their children. Does it help? Can you actually build it, and what does it do?

People who talk about building positive self-esteem in a child are often trying to cure the child from the feeling of a "bad self," or they're trying to prevent the child from developing a "bad self" by having the child see herself solely in a positive light. This is a confusing idea for several reasons.

First, it places the security of the child at risk by basing it on her positive performance. The concept of self-esteem hinges on a child being able to see herself positively. What happens when her performance is not positive? What happens if she fails?

If the goal is to see ourselves in a "good" way, what will we do with failure? How can we maintain this "positive view" in the light of badness and failure? One answer is to have more positive than negative. Another is to have others always building us up. None of these answers end up with the only security that protects us from any possible failure: love.

A better way than seeing ourselves as good is seeing ourselves as loved. A child who is loved as herself, both good and bad, does not need to see herself as positive or negative. She sees herself as loved, and the whole issue goes away. A loved self is stronger than a positive self: the child doesn't need to worry about losing her "good self." She doesn't need to hide or deny what she does. No matter how she performs, she will be loved.

A second problem with self-esteem is that the focus is on maintaining a good view of ourselves as opposed to maintaining a relationship. Happy people do not get all caught up in themselves. They do not get obsessed with whether or not they are "good enough." They focus more on tasks and loving other people. When they fail, they try to solve the problem. They don't worry about their "goodness." They are more into learning how to do better.

The self-esteem problem is a false solution to a wrong focus. Think of the people you know who are unhappy. Many of them perform well as those who are much happier. The difference is that the unhappy ones are always worried about not being "good enough," and the happy ones don't even think in those terms. The latter are more into others and life itself. The third problem with focusing on self-esteem is that the "good self" is a proud self. And a proud self does not develop into a humble person who expresses gratitude. We are grateful because we find love and success beyond what we deserve. It's all grace. So even our talents should lead us to have gratitude for what we have.

Now, I'm not saying that children should not be praised for doing well. Praise is a great motivator. Validating her ability to do something consolidates a child's feelings of competency. The parental stamp of approval helps the child internalize this feeling of competency. Children were created with a need for parental approval, so praise them for a job well done. This does not create pride. Praise is a good thing. Validate your children's talents and abilities. Fill up their tummies with good feelings about themselves. It is important to feel good and secure about their talents, work and abilities.

But do not buy into the philosophy that building positive self-esteem is the answer to all of the child's problems. Doing so creates more problems than it solves. Children need, most of all, to feel loved as they are, and then to be encouraged to learn how to do things well from a loved position. The issue of "Am I good enough?" will become a non-issue. A "loved self" is much more secure than a "good self" any day.

