

PEDAGOGICAL INPUT

for the adventure of family life



47_Equality strengthens self-esteem

Parents often ask how they can boost their children's self-esteem. Equal means that the wishes, needs, boundaries, values and thoughts of every family member are perceived and taken seriously, regardless of age, health or gender.

Acknowledging and taking seriously satisfies the basic need to be seen.

No one is hurt, criticised, humiliated, or ridiculed for what they feel, think, or do. Taking this seriously and perceiving it fulfils the fundamental human need to be seen and heard just the way you are. This allows children to develop a healthy self-esteem because they feel valuable and "right" just the way they are. Any criticism, sarcasm, or disrespect makes children feel bad and guilty. Equality is an inner attitude expressed above all by how we speak and treat each other.

How do we treat each other?

Parents often find it difficult to take their children's wishes seriously because they believe they must then fulfil those wishes. And children always have wishes. However, just because I take someone's wish seriously doesn't mean I have to fulfil it. It makes a big difference HOW I treat the person with these wishes.

There is a difference between acknowledging the wish and saying no to it, and criticising someone for making a wish: "Stop whining with your doll," "You are never satisfied, you always want something," "Didn't you understand my no? How often do you have to be told something?" These responses offend, demean, shame, and criticise the child, thereby violating its integrity. It feels bad and guilty even to have a wish.

How can we express ourselves equally?

"I see how much you want this doll, I think it's beautiful too, but I don't want to buy it for you now." That's a clear statement that doesn't offend anyone. The mother takes the child seriously as well as herself. This shows the child: "You can take yourself seriously and you can respect others." This behaviour makes a great impression on the child, although at the time it may be frustrated for not getting what it wanted. However, its dignity has not been violated: no criticism, blame, putting down. People who feel they are being taken seriously do not insist so much on necessarily having their wishes fulfilled.

What matters is not the content, whether I say yes or no to something, but HOW I say something, whether I respect the child's dignity.

"I don't want to play with you now. I want to rest for half an hour." As opposed to: "Can't you see I'm tired? When are you going to understand that?"

"I want you to hang up the jacket because I don't want to fall over it." As opposed to: "You brat! If you don't learn to hang up your jacket, I'll have to take other measures."

It is important to talk about yourself, your wishes and beliefs.

This can also be quiet anger: "Damn. I want you to leave my computer alone. This makes me angry!" instead of: "Can't you hear, you rascal. You're always playing with my things. You're annoying."

When I talk about myself, I don't hurt the other person, but respect their dignity and mine. Nobody gets hurt and yet I clearly state where my limits are. So I respect my limits as well as the other person's.

Taking responsibility strengthens the adult's self-esteem as well as increases the child's self-esteem because it sees that: In this family one can keep one's own boundaries without hurting others.

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