

F E A T U R E

"SELF RESPECT"

by Georgina T. Roberts

Everyone talks about how important it is to foster a child's self-esteem. But what, exactly, does that mean? Self-esteem comes from a feeling that one is respected and clearly, children's self-respect comes from parents and teachers speaking respectfully to them.

But no one can speak respectfully without having self-respect, something that is in pretty short supply for parents in our society. Parenthood is a job with long hours, no benefits or vacations (in fact, vacations mean more work rather than less!) and no chance for advancement, no matter how well you do the job. Parents do it solely for the rewards of helping a child grow, but they certainly do not get rewards from the society around them. And, of course, they take every little thing their children do, especially the bad things, as a reflection on themselves, feeling that the normal developmental problems and unavoidable illnesses are completely their fault. And often, they even feel responsible and guilty for things that they should be proud of.

There are many examples of signs of good parenting which are often mistaken as sign of bad parenting. For example, when their child cries upon entering a new program or activity in a strange place with strange people, parents are embarrassed and think that the child is

showing signs of poor mothering. Absolutely not: To the contrary, this shows that he has formed a good attachment to his parents, that he knows the difference between the familiar and the unfamiliar and how much he trusts and depends on his parents to help him manage this new situation. He really is behaving appropriately. We would be concerned if he did not show signs of distress in a new and strange place.

And at the end of the day, when he gives Mom and Dad a hard time, wants to play a little longer, wants the teacher to help him put on his coat, parents may think he really likes the caregiver better. Not so. Actually, this is his way of showing them that he missed them so much, that it was so hard to wait for them, that now he's showing them how that feels by making them

wait. But he also has good feelings for Mom and Dad and wants to be sure to give them the picture he made for them and we hope that they know that all this behaviour is a sign of good parenting, of how terribly important they are to him.

We also hope that preschool teachers are taking advantage of these kinds of situations to point out to parents what vitally important work they are doing in raising their children. This is a particularly important time in young parents' lives to have that support to bolster their sense of self-respect and confidence so that they can nurture their child's self-esteem.

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