

CORE SKILL: RELATE

Self-Confidence



What You Need to Know

A child's Sense of Self, is their own perceptions of themselves as individuals (i.e., how *they* would define or describe themselves). While they are related, sense of self focuses on children's understanding of WHO they are, where self-confidence is more about whether a child believes they are capable. When children feel confident in their abilities, it increases their engagement, motivation, and empowers them to try new things. It helps them see challenging tasks as something to practice rather than something to avoid. It allows them to persevere when things are tough. You can help children develop a healthy sense of self-confidence by valuing their ideas and contributions and providing opportunities for *them* to take responsibility, try things, and be acknowledged for their efforts.

Things to Consider

Providing positive feedback (also called praise or positive reinforcement) can be an effective tool for supporting confidence; however, it can also be a little tricky at times. Consider the following when positively acknowledging children:

- ◆ Focus on **effort and persistence** rather than doing something "perfect" or "right." This makes it more likely for children to feel confident in their skill development, especially when presented with a challenge.
- ◆ Did you know that children should receive 5 positive interactions for every 1 negative or corrective interaction? Sometimes, the balance between giving corrective feedback and positive acknowledgment is unbalanced; this is especially true for children who tend to be very active and sometimes impulsive. It's easy to notice when children need some corrective feedback (e.g., walk inside please, it's not safe to run down the hallway) and to miss the many instances when children are engaged actively and appropriately.
- ◆ **Be aware of gender stereotypes.** Often, we inadvertently praise along gender stereotypes. For example, acknowledging girls for being caring and boys for building. Be sure to acknowledge the *child's* interests and accomplishments no matter where they fall in terms of gender stereotypes.

Development of Self-Confidence

Between 36 and 48 months, children may:	Between 48 and 60 months, children may:
Show confidence in their own abilities through relationships with others.	Show confidence in their own abilities through relationships with others.
Seek to draw adults to objects of interest or new physical skills and attends to adults' responses.	Contribute their own ideas, skills, and abilities to group discussions, activities, and experiences with adults and other children.
Expresses enjoyment in accomplishing daily routines and new skills and may draw adult attention to these accomplishments.	Shows satisfaction and seeks acknowledgment when completing a task or solving a problem.

Setting the Stage

Activities and materials that support the development of self-confidence:

- ◆ Activities that are slightly challenging. That means they are difficult enough to push children beyond what they can already do, while success is still within reach/reason. Children may feel easily defeated by tricky tasks, even if they are capable of doing it! Be prepared to provide words of encouragement and support to promote persistence. If strong emotions occur, refer to Regulate: Supporting Emotions for strategies.
- ◆ Hands-on, child-directed tasks. Give children the control or a say in what they do whenever possible (e.g., encourage them to choose the books you read or songs you sing, mix the ingredients).
- ◆ Independent routines. Build time into your routines so you can slow down and let children try to do something as independently as possible (e.g., putting on a coat or hat; getting a bag from a hook; cleaning up own dish after meals).
- ◆ "Real" responsibilities. Make children feel valued and confident by trusting them with *real* responsibilities/tasks around the classroom (e.g., daily helpers, setting or cleaning up the table, taking care of a pet).
- ◆ Group tasks. Give children an opportunity to participate in or contribute to a group or partner in a meaningful way.



Intentional Teaching Practices to Support Self-Confidence

OBSERVE	OBSERVE Take time to observe children’s self-confidence. Who takes risks and tries unfamiliar or difficult tasks (i.e., has the confidence to try)? Who shares their accomplishments with pride? Do children feel confident in sharing their ideas and interests? Who can benefit from more support? Are you giving certain children more positive acknowledgment compared to others? Are there some children who rarely receive positive acknowledgment?
FOCUS	Narrate Self-Confidence Notice and comment on children’s confidence in tasks and feelings of pride and accomplishment. <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ “You did that all by yourself and you are smiling—you feel proud!”◆ “You solved the problem! You both wanted the toy and you decided to take turns. You stayed calm and figured it out. You knew you could find a solution if you kept trying!” Model and narrate how to handle challenging or new situations with confidence. <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ “Hmmm, I’m really not sure if I can figure out how to make all of this fit, but I’m going to try my best to find a solution! I’m confident I can figure this out if I keep trying.”
SCAFFOLD I	Promote Child Autonomy Give children a say in what happens in the classroom to let them know that you value their ideas and interests . <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Offer choices: “Which area of the room will you play in during Choice Time? Point to or tell me which center you’d like to play in today.”◆ Imitate their play: “Oh, you’re being cooks! Can I come to your restaurant?”◆ Be flexible: “You really want to get the glitter out of the cupboard to add to our paint. Okay!” Children develop confidence through repeated moments of feeling successful and competent. This comes from children completing things as independently as possible . Focus on providing support instead of solving problems or doing things <i>for</i> children. Watch closely so that you can provide hints or clues that help children come up with or carry out solutions or tasks on their own as much as possible. <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ “What do you think would happen if you...”◆ “Hmm, where have we seen something like this before? Remember when...”
SCAFFOLD II	Acknowledge Effort Focus on the effort children show more than praising results. Praising effort encourages confidence because it lets a child know that what matters most is how hard they try (which is something they can control) rather than perfection (which isn’t always attainable). Focusing on effort builds the confidence that frees children to take risks and try new things. <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ “Wow, you are really trying hard to figure out where to put that piece. I see you keep turning it,” instead of, “You are so smart! You knew just what to do!”
KEEP IT GOING	Consider what you learned from observing children as well as their reaction to your Focus and Scaffolds. Find ways to build the activities from Setting the Stage into your regular routines.