

DEVELOPING CONFIDENCE

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What a great thing it is to be confident! We all relish that feeling. Are we born with confidence? No. Confidence is developed over our whole lifetime. We cannot create confidence alone. It comes from outside influences and is developed within. It is a precious attribute that allows us to face our lives and careers with bold anticipation.

How do we attain confidence? It develops from infancy. We master our childhood milestones with the help and encouragement of our parents. Their enthusiasm makes us want to try harder till we master the next thing. We also learn to be confident by observing others and through practice and repetition. We become adept by accruing knowledge and adding experience. Our confidence grows when we are praised by others and, in particular, when the praise comes from an expert in that field.

As we mature we become more objective. When something goes wrong we are more inclined to pull from our previous experiences. If we usually succeed in that skill, but something failed today, we still have confidence because of our previous positive experiences. We gave it our best and we realize that there were probably other variables that changed the result today. A confident person will look objectively at what went wrong and try for a positive result next time. A person lacking confidence will think subjectively. They will not likely have successful previous experiences to draw from, will blame themselves or others for the results and may be reluctant to try that skill again.

The more positive feedback we get the less likely we are to become fearful of failure. A perfect example is the 2009 Tour de France. Lance Armstrong had won the Tour seven times and then retired. When he decided to come out of retirement and join the race again, he set his own expectations. His confidence in his ability came from his past successes. Both he and the rest of the world knew of his reputation in cycle racing. Therefore, his confidence was not going to be shattered if he didn't win the race this year. He set his own goal of standing on the podium and went home with his confidence totally intact. Third was great for him. The important thing is to have enough 'positives' in our 'memory bank' to counter the times when we don't meet our own, or others' expectations. This is what we, as parents, need to deposit in our children's minds so they develop and maintain confidence throughout their lives.

There are circumstances that prevent or inhibit the development of confidence. These may range from the lack of encouragement and praise at home, through to impossible expectations a parent, teacher or coach may lay on them. These may lead to constant failure. It might be the comparison of one child to another, or lack of recognition of a child's gifts and talents. It might be

constant put downs that discourage a child from trying. It might even be the lack of a parent's confidence. In this situation, the parent is not demonstrating confidence and may not know how to train a child to be successful. Then there is the belief that a confident person is just plain bigheaded. There is a huge difference between being confident in our abilities and being cocky, precocious or a showoff. In fact, those that do exhibit bragging tendencies often lack self-confidence, and are overcompensating.

We need to teach our kids how to succeed in skills and abilities. We also need to teach them to be humble and acknowledge those who helped them get there. Kids need to understand the reactions of those around them, especially those who would want to pull them down. They need to learn how to be team players and to pass it on by encouraging and coaching others. They need to be around successful people to fuel their own confidence.

If you, as a parent, do not have confidence, then there are many available resources. Everyone has the right and the need to feel confident. We don't have to be confident at everything. After all, we are all lifelong learners. Allow yourself to be pleased with your own efforts. Set goals that are attainable and then goals that make you stretch. Accept that becoming confident will be difficult to achieve, that you will need to work at it, and that there will be a few failures along the way. Schedule those in! We only get one 'go' at life and we need to make the most of it. Be brave! Be bold!

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.