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Accentuate the Positive Self-Talk
Children Succeed with Positive Affirmations

By

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Within each child is the will to succeed. Success for one child may be getting straight A's. For another it may be hitting a home run, and for still another it may be remembering to turn in his homework everyday. No matter how your child defines it, he has the potential to succeed. This potential often lies in what he believes about himself and in the way he interprets those beliefs. Self-talk or our internal dialog has a profound impact on this interpretation and his sense of self-esteem.

One place positive self-talk has been proven to play a key role is in school. Most classrooms are comprised of a diverse population of varying ages, degrees of ability, and backgrounds. This environment is chock full of scenarios that can wreck havoc on self-esteem. For school age children, positive self-talk can ward off the defeatist attitude many children develop in the face of competition. It can turn statements like, "I am such a dummy. I will never get 100's on my math tests like Mary," into "Mary is really good in math and I am really good in spelling. Maybe we should help each other study." Just that slight attitude adjustment can mean the difference between academic failure and personal success.

In 1990, the St. Clement Elementary School in Somerville, Massachusetts put positive self-talk to the test by implementing the "*I Am a Good Person*" curriculum. The program, developed by veteran educator Sister Joan Patricia Lonergan, is based on the simple premise that all students are good, capable, and have the potential to fulfill their dreams. In a 1990 interview with the *Boston Globe* Sister Lonergan said, "If you teach children to love themselves first, then they can learn to do whatever they want... '*I Am a Good Person*' helps to strengthen students' self-concept, enabling them to recognize and celebrate their goodness, their gifts, and their strengths."

The students that participated in the "*I Am a Good Person*" curriculum met with Sister Lonergan once a week for relaxation and creative visualization. They also did daily affirmation exercises like looking into a mirror and saying something positive about themselves. In addition, teachers lead the students in a group affirmation exercise before every lesson, and they were encouraged to say affirmations to themselves throughout the

day. The youngsters also kept a positive achievement journal in which they recorded things like when they did well on a test or helped a classmate. They were asked to refer back to these successes when they faced with a challenge or had a problem. Did all this positive energy make a difference? You bet it did. Not only was self-esteem at an all time high, but teachers reported greater concentration and improved grades across the board.

The benefit of positive self-talk is very evident in, but not limited to, school age children. Children of all ages can develop and practice the steps to building self-esteem through affirmations. When young children hear you talk about how special they are, it becomes part of their internal dialog. These statements might be part of a conversation or come from repetitive affirmations. In addition, interactive tools, such as *I AM a Lovable ME! ® Affirmations for Children*, can be extremely helpful to parents and educators introducing the concept of positive self-talk to young children. Available in colorful picture book or lively audio CD formats, it features over 100 affirmations from the LOVABLE ME bug. They include the importance of healthy habits, being part of a family, being a good friend, and much more. *I AM a Lovable ME! ® Affirmations for Children*, the first in a series of empowerment tools developed for children by the writing team of Sharon Penchina, C.Ht. and Dr. Stuart Hoffman, is a winner of the MOM'S CHOICE AWARD.

Sidebar:

According to Douglas Bloch, M.A., author of *The Power of Positive Talk*, it is possible to teach your child how to nurture positive self-talk and become his own greatest source of self-esteem. In *The Power of Positive Talk* Bloch describes a four-step process that can help your child formulate the positive messages necessary to his individual success.

- **Ask For Specifics.** Ask the child if there is anything in his life he would like to feel more positive about. If he answers with a specific goal or particular challenge, have him describe, in detail, what he would like to achieve.
- **Feel Him Out.** Now, dig a little deeper and find out how he feels about his goal. Is he anxious? Hopeful? Excited? Apprehensive? Hurt? Try to get his story and the emotions attached to it in his own words. With younger children this can be difficult, so you might suggest they draw a picture of how they feel and take your clues from there.
- **Mirror, Mirror.** Reflect his feelings and desires back onto him. Use statements, "It must have been hard when that happened." and "It sounds like that is important to you." This helps to validate his feelings and let him know he has been heard.
- **Formulate a Thought.** When the child can fully describe the situation and the feelings associated with it, he is ready to form an empowering affirmation. Ask him to make a positive statement that sums up the situation or feeling he has described. If he has trouble putting his goal into words, you can help, but the

affirmation should be his own. Once he has done this, repeat his affirmation back to him. Then have him repeat it to himself. If he shows signs of disbelief, you can reassure him by saying, "I know you are having a hard time believing this, but I believe it." Eventually, he will begin to believe as well, and that belief will put him on the path to success.