

## 15 ways to love your child confidently

Parents have two things in common. Firstly, every parent experiences some challenges or difficulties at some point raising kids. Whether it's managing challenging behaviour, keeping a child's chin up when life doesn't go their way or helping a young person handle the ups and downs of adolescence – every parent must deal with challenges along the way.

Secondly, all parents want their children to thrive and flourish. That means we need to love our kids confidently, rather than protect, pamper and problem-solve for our kids.

Here are fifteen parenting ideas to help your kids thrive and in doing so, may reduce the number of parenting challenges you experience along the way:

### 1. When kids can, let them do

The independence mindset that we promote here at Parenting Ideas means that parents look for as many opportunities as possible to develop self-sufficiency in children. When kids can get themselves out of bed in the morning we allow them to do so. When a toddler can clear her plate and spoon away we encourage her to do so. When a teenager can catch a train into the city we allow him to do so, even though we may be uncomfortable about letting go. Self-esteem and confidence is built by kids gaining mastery over their world and doing the little things that we as adults so often do for them.

### 2. Develop a growth mindset

This generation shouldn't grow up like past generations thinking that their natural abilities set the tone for the pattern for the rest of our lives. If you think that you'll never be good at maths/writing/sport/whatever, then you have a fixed mindset. We now know that talent and smarts aren't fixed- they evolve over time with practice and effort. There's a lot parents can do to develop a growth mindset in kids. Start by linking your child's success with effort rather than linking it to natural ability. You want your child to grow up believing that hard work and strategy have as much to do with their success in any area as their natural ability.

### 3. Encourage them to play

Adults are very fond of organising environments for kids to enable learning and maximise their development. Kids' lives are full of organised after school activities including sports practice, music practice and swimming lessons. There's not much time for mucking around these days. Self-initiated play, particularly when it occurs outside is great for kids' confidence. Left to their own devices kids often take risks that would make adults shudder, if only they knew about them. But it's through risks such as climbing trees, building cubbies and navigating their neighbourhood that kids learn to extend themselves and develop skills that they didn't know they had.

### 4. Give them some tough stuff to do

Life in the twenty-first century is comfortable for most of us. We've eradicated most of the hardship from life so that most kids in developed countries like Australia wake up on a winter morning with a full stomach, a warm house and the prospect of being driven to school. Nothing builds confidence like a deep appreciation for what you have and an understanding that you can put up with some hardship and discomfort so consider ways you can disrupt deep comfort levels. Maybe they have to do some chores (make their lunch/their bed/feed a younger sibling) in the morning; maybe they should walk to school; maybe they can do without morning tea if they leave it at home. Maybe..... I'm sure you can think of your own ideas to help them feel familiar with discomfort.

### 5. Make sure they do something that someone else relies on

So what does your child do that someone else relies on? Does he feed the dog? Empty the dishwasher? Help his sibling with homework? Assuming responsibility builds kids' confidence. We often give responsibility to kids who we know can carry out the responsibilities without a hitch, not the kids who really need it as they sometimes struggle and won't do it right.

### 6. Give them psychological space

Sometimes we know too much about our children's lives. Most times we know if they had breakfast, who their friends are and how their day went at school. All this knowing may keep us in the loop with our kids, but it can also be suffocating for some children. Children benefit when they have some space from their parents' attention and best intentions. Space gives them the chance to solve their problems in their own way and develop their own resourcefulness, which is a fantastic confidence-builder at any age.

### **7. Ask them to help you**

Nothing displays faith in a child's abilities like a genuine request for help. Next time you're about to embark on an activity (cooking, washing the car, loading the washing machine) ask a child to give you a hand. Even better, give the total job to your child if it's practical and timely to do so. Now that's what I call a show of faith!

### **8. Let them teach you something**

When was the last time you asked your child to teach you how to do something? Kids who see themselves as strugglers can get a boost in confidence when they teach their parents how to do something that they are good at.

### **9. Encourage your child to be a generalist**

The years before adolescence have traditionally been seen as a period when children explore various activities and develop a variety of interests. Essentially it's the time to be a generalist. Specialisation best happens from around fourteen years of age when young people start to define their identity (*'I'm into music!' 'I'm a sports nut!'*) by the activities they pursue. Children now seem to specialise at a much younger age, which can limit the options available to them later on. Encourage your child to try a variety of different activities to build a broad base of competencies and interests that will serve him well in the teenage years.

### **10. Problem solve together**

While kids need a chance to resolve some of their every day problems – such as managing pesky siblings, dealing with strict teachers and sharing a workspace at school with peers they don't like- by themselves, they can also benefit from sitting down with a parent and working their way through problems together. All the aforementioned problems (and many more besides) could be workshopped so that kids get the benefit of your wisdom, without you solving their problems for them.

### **11. Encourage assertion**

Kids generally resolve relationship problems with friends and siblings in three ways – through accommodation, aggression or assertion. Accommodating the needs a friend or sibling is admirable but some kids give way too much because they don't know how to stand up for themselves. Some children will use aggression and other high power ways to get their own way. Encourage your child to be assertive and ask for what they want rather than give way all the time or be aggressive. Assertiveness is as much about strong body language as it is about the words they use. So encourage them to practise standing up straight, using a strong voice and making eye contact when they say to a sibling or friend, "No. I don't want you to borrow that."

### **12. Help them see beyond the label**

A child who defines himself as being stupid because he struggles academically benefits from parents who lovingly point out that there is more to a life than schoolwork. Help him see the strengths that they has in other areas of life such as making friends; success at leisure activities and the personal qualities that he or she displays such as loyalty, patience and persistence. Help children see past labels that they can place on themselves.

### **13. Cue confidence not anxiety**

Recently I heard a parent say to her primary school-aged child prior to going on a class excursion, "You're not going to be anxious are you?" If the child wasn't anxious already she was likely to be after her mother planted the idea in her head. Children generally take their cues about how they should see events from their parents so we need to be very careful about what we say to children particularly when they go into new or unfamiliar activities. Better to cue a child to be courageous with a statement such as "Now's the time be brave." Hmm! Now that's a thought!

### **14. Turn the volume down on the News**

There's no doubt we live in a fearful world that reduces children's propensity to take the sensible risks that they need to develop. The media with its twenty-four-hour news cycle has a lot to answer for. Consider how much News your children are exposed to via television and radio particularly in the pre-school and early primary school years. Kids at these ages are faulty processors of information and can be adversely influenced by News events that occur across the world. Fear defeats confidence and inflates anxiety and tension.

### **15. Help your child rationalise, rather than exaggerate their worries**

Children and teenagers can easily jump to conclusions and catastrophise (*"I'm hopeless!"*), blaming themselves when they experience difficulties. Help your child work through their difficulties so they can rationalise and find solutions. Challenge their self-talk and help them see that a situation probably isn't as bad as they are making out. By calling out their propensity to catastrophise you may not be making yourself popular, however you'll be teaching a valuable lesson in staying calm rather than letting their emotions get the better of them.

Building children's resilience and confidence is a basic parenting task. It always has been and always will be. Some kids need more of a focus on resilience and confidence-building than others. Best to take your cues from your kids and look for strategies that stretch them rather than restrict them or keep them dependent on you.