Building Her Confidence

A parent guide to supporting girls' self-esteem: what to notice, what to say, and small steps you can start this week.

A printable guide for parents of school-age girls and teens · from Ashlee Fedyk, Registered Psychologist · www.cognitiveacademy.com

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1 A Quick Parent Reflection

Self-esteem is how a child feels about who she is: whether she sees herself as capable, likeable, and worthwhile. Every girl has ups and downs, especially during big changes. Check anything you've noticed in your daughter **most weeks**. This is not a diagnosis or a score; it's simply a way to see patterns more clearly.

How she talks about herself *self-talk*

- ☐ Is harsh with herself ("I'm so stupid," "I'm the worst")
- ☐ Brushes off compliments or doesn't believe them
- ☐ Focuses on what went wrong more than what went right

How she handles challenges *trying new things*

- ☐ Avoids new activities or says "I'll be bad at it"
- ☐ Gives up quickly when something feels hard
- ☐ Holds back unless she's sure she'll succeed

How she handles mistakes *perfectionism*

- ☐ Gets very upset over small mistakes
- ☐ Redoes work again and again until it feels "perfect"
- ☐ Sees one mistake as proof she's "not good enough"

How she sees others *comparison*

- ☐ Often compares herself to friends, siblings, or classmates
- ☐ Feels worse about herself after time on social media
- ☐ Talks a lot about how she looks compared to others

How she looks for approval *reassurance*

- ☐ Asks "Is this okay?" or "Are you mad?" very often
- ☐ Needs lots of reassurance before making decisions
- ☐ Feels crushed by small criticism or feedback

How she shows up with friends *people-pleasing*

- ☐ Goes along with others even when she disagrees
- ☐ Has a hard time saying no or sharing her opinion
- ☐ Worries a lot about being left out or disliked

How to use this: a few checks simply tell you where to start. Her confidence can grow with your support, and the next pages show you how. If you're seeing many of these signs, or they're getting stronger over time, see page 6 for when to reach out for more support.

Educational content, not a substitute for an individual assessment.

2 What Builds Self-Esteem

Healthy self-esteem isn't about feeling great all the time or believing she's the best at everything. It's a steady inner sense that **"I can handle things, I belong, and I matter just as I am."** Three building blocks help it grow:

Competence

"I can do hard things."

Confidence grows from **experience**: trying, struggling, practicing, and seeing herself improve. Small wins she earns herself matter more than praise alone.

Connection

"I belong and I'm loved."

Feeling accepted by family and at least one or two good friends gives her a safe base to take risks, make mistakes, and bounce back.

Value

"I matter beyond how I look or perform."

Her worth isn't earned through grades, goals, or appearance. Kindness, curiosity, humor, and courage are part of who she is too.

Notice the *who*, not just the *what*

Girls often hear praise about how they look or how they performed. Widening what you notice helps her see a fuller picture of herself. Try to name what you see in four areas:

What to notice	What it sounds like	Try to catch her...
Effort the work she puts in	*"You kept going on that project even when it got frustrating."*	practicing, revising, sticking with something hard
Strengths what she's naturally good at	*"You have such a creative way of solving problems."*	drawing, building, organizing, making people laugh
Values what she cares about	*"You stood up for what felt fair, even though it wasn't easy."*	being honest, fair, loyal, or caring for animals or nature
Character who she is with others	*"I noticed how kind you were to your brother when he was upset."*	including others, apologizing, helping without being asked

Be specific and genuine. "Great job!" is nice, but "You asked the coach for help, and that took courage" tells her exactly what she did well. Kids can usually tell when praise is exaggerated, so honest and specific works best.

Try this week

Aim to notice **one effort or strength** and **one value or character trait** each day, and tell her about it in a sentence. Keep it short and specific, then move on. Comments that come up naturally in the car, at dinner, or at bedtime often land better than a big talk.

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3 Say This Instead

When she says something unkind about herself, it's natural to jump in with "That's not true!" But quick reassurance can leave her feeling unheard. Instead, **listen first, then gently help her see a bigger picture.**

1. Listen
Stay calm and curious. Let her finish without fixing.

2. Validate
Name the feeling: "That sounds really discouraging."

3. Widen the view
Help her see more than the one harsh thought.

"I'm so stupid."
When she's hard on herself

Instead of: ~~"Don't say that about yourself!"~~
Try: "It sounds like that really frustrated you. Getting something wrong doesn't make you stupid; it means you're learning. What part felt the trickiest?"

"Everyone is prettier than me."
When she compares her looks

Instead of: ~~"You're the prettiest girl there!"~~
Try: "It sounds like you've been feeling down about yourself. I'm really glad you told me. What's been making you feel this way?" Later: "The people who love you care about who you are, like how funny and thoughtful you are."

"I'm not good at anything."
When she feels discouraged

Instead of: ~~"Of course you are, you're good at lots of things."~~
Try: "It feels like that right now, and that's a heavy feeling. Can we think of one thing that used to be hard for you that's easier now?"

After a mistake
A bad test, game, or moment

Instead of: ~~"It's no big deal, just forget about it."~~
Try: "That was disappointing. Mistakes happen to everyone, including me. What would you do differently next time? What would you keep the same?"

After social media
When scrolling leaves her feeling worse

Instead of: ~~"That's why you shouldn't be on your phone."~~
Try: "You seem a bit low after scrolling. A lot of what we see online is edited or just someone's best moments. How do you usually feel after looking at those accounts?"

"What if they don't like me?"
When she worries about friends

Instead of: ~~"Who cares what they think?"~~
Try: "It makes sense to want to be liked. Who are the people you can be yourself with? What do you like about being with them?"

You don't need the perfect words. If a conversation doesn't go well, you can always come back later: "I've been thinking about what you said yesterday. Can we talk about it again?"

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4 Everyday Confidence Builders

Confidence grows through small, everyday moments much more than big talks. You don't need to do all of these. **Pick one or two** that fit your family and practice them for a few weeks.

Praise effort and specific actions
Name what she *did*: "You practiced that piece every day this week." This helps her connect effort with progress.

Help her try small brave things
Break big fears into small steps: ordering her own food, asking a teacher a question, trying one new activity. Celebrate trying, whatever the result.

Model kind self-talk
Let her hear you be gentle with yourself: "I made a mistake at work today. I'm going to fix it and give myself a break."

Reduce appearance-focused comments
Try to keep comments about bodies, weight, and looks (hers, yours, and other people's) to a minimum. Talk more about what bodies *do* and what she enjoys.

Support her friendships
Make time for friends who help her feel like herself. Talk about what a good friend looks like, and help her practice what to say when friendships get tricky.

Plan social media conversations
Talk before problems come up: which accounts make her feel good or bad, what's edited, and what she can do when scrolling leaves her feeling low.

Help her identify her strengths
Ask, "What do you think you're good at?" and add your own observations. Find chances for her to use those strengths, whether it's helping a younger child, building something, or joining a club that fits her interests.

MY PARENT WORKSHEET

Strengths I see in her effort, skills, values, character

One small brave step she could try this week keep it small enough to feel doable

A kind phrase we can practice e.g., "I'm still learning," "Mistakes help me grow," "I can try again"

One thing I'll try to do differently e.g., fewer comments about looks, more specific praise

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5 My Confidence Page

For parents: sit down together somewhere relaxed, like over a snack or a car ride home. Let her write or draw her own answers, and offer ideas only if she gets stuck. There are no wrong answers, and it's okay to leave some spaces blank and come back later.

Things I'm proud of
Big or small, from today or any time

Things I'm good at
At school, at home, with friends, just for fun

People who make me feel safe
People I can talk to when things are hard

Things I like about myself
Not about how I look, about who I am

What I can say to myself when things are hard
Ideas: "I can do hard things." · "It's okay to make mistakes." · "I'm still learning." · "I am more than one bad day."

Something brave I want to try
One small step that feels a little scary

What helps me feel better
e.g., music, a walk, a hug, drawing, talking

Keep it somewhere she can see it, like her bedroom wall or a notebook, and add to it over time. Looking back at it together on a hard day can be a gentle reminder of everything she is.

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6 A Note to You & When to Seek Support

Thank you for taking the time to read this guide. Simply noticing how your daughter feels about herself, and wanting to help, already makes a difference. Self-esteem doesn't change overnight, and there will be good days and harder ones. What matters most is that she knows you're in her corner.

In my work as a Registered Psychologist, I see how much girls benefit when the adults around them notice who they are, not just what they do or how they look. Be patient with her, and with yourself. You don't have to get it perfect to make a real difference.

Warmly, Ashlee Fedyk, Registered Psychologist · Cognitive Academy · www.cognitiveacademy.com

When to seek more support

Low confidence is common, but sometimes it's part of something bigger. Reach out for support if you notice:

- Sadness, irritability, or hopelessness that lasts for weeks
- Big changes in eating, sleep, or energy
- Talking about herself in very harsh or hopeless ways
- Pulling away from friends, family, or activities she used to enjoy
- Not wanting to go to school, or avoiding it often
- Signs of self-harm, or talk of not wanting to live

A good first step is to talk with your **family doctor**, your daughter's **school counselor**, or a **psychologist**. An individual assessment can help clarify what's going on and what kind of support would help most. At school, it may also be worth asking about supports such as an IPP/IEP or your local equivalent.

If you believe she is in immediate danger, call your local emergency services (9-1-1 in Canada and the US). If she has talked about self-harm or not wanting to live, you can call or text **9-8-8**, the free suicide crisis helpline in Canada and the US, available 24 hours a day. You can also call 9-8-8 if you need support yourself.

Learn more: www.cognitiveacademy.com

My notes: what I want to remember

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