



2. Helping children's emotional development

What children need to face up successfully to life's difficulties and grow up emotionally healthy is:

1. having the **connection** of a good relationship with a parent or other caring adult
2. experiencing **competence** through being able to do things and achieve success in their lives, beginning in infancy, and
3. feeling they are making a **contribution** to their family and community.

Time spent enjoying playing with you and other fun times with you at home and on outings will help build up your child's sense of **connection**.

Children's self-esteem is built on their experiences of **competence**. To build your child's self-esteem, use **labelled praise (Refer to Tip 13 Changing problem behaviour – Praise and encourage cooperative behaviour)** and point to your child's specific, concrete achievements. These might be:

- academic, e.g. getting a stamp or star on a worksheet for good work
- physical, e.g. riding a bike, catching a ball
- sporting, e.g. being able to blow bubbles during swimming lessons
- playing, e.g. taking turns, being careful with toys, amusing self, playing independently
- artistic, e.g. doing a painting or collage at preschool
- living skills, e.g. eating with a fork, doing up their shirt, tying shoelaces
- social, e.g. helping Mum by getting a nappy for the baby, showing concern when their sister fell over and hurt her knee.

The experience of **competence** begins in infancy when babies begin to know that parents come when they cry, then when they start to crawl, reach for toys and do things for themselves. Learning to walk, feed, wash and dress yourself all add to this experience. So does learning that you can do things that help others in the family and so make a **contribution** to society. **Labelled praise (Refer to Tip 13 Changing problem behaviour – Praise and encourage cooperative behaviour)** helps children to identify their areas of **competence** and **contribution**. That's another reason why labelled praise is so important.

Pointing out and praising these particular things your child achieves will help your child to develop a sense of self as a worthwhile and confident person, and protect your child from feelings of helplessness, failure and depression when things go wrong, as they sometimes do for all of us. It helps your child to pick himself up, go on, and try again.