

CORE SKILL: RELATE

Self-Confidence



What You Need to Know

Previously, you focused on developing children’s sense of self by helping them explore how they are similar and different from other people. As children develop *who* they are and the awareness that their bodies, thoughts, and actions are separate from others, they are working on feeling confident, secure, and proud in themselves! When children feel confident in their abilities, it increases their engagement and motivation, and empowers them to try new things. It helps them see challenging tasks as something to practice rather than something to avoid. You can help children develop their self-confidence by valuing their ideas and contributions and providing opportunities for *them* to take responsibility, try things, and be successful.

Things to Consider

Providing positive feedback (also called praise or positive reinforcement) can be an effective tool for supporting confidence; however, it can also be a little tricky at times. Consider the following when positively acknowledging children:

- ◆ Focus on **effort and persistence** rather than doing something “perfect” or “beautifully.” This makes it more likely for a child to feel confident in their abilities when presented with a challenge.
- ◆ Did you know that children should receive 5 positive interactions for every 1 corrective interaction? Sometimes, the balance between giving corrective feedback and positive acknowledgment is off; this is especially true for children who tend to be very active and sometimes impulsive. It’s easy to notice when children need some corrective feedback (e.g., “walk inside please”) and to miss all the instances when children are engaged actively and appropriately.
- ◆ **Be aware of gender stereotypes.** We often inadvertently praise according to gender stereotypes. For example, we acknowledge girls for being caring and boys for building. Eventually, children internalize this praise to think those are the things they are good at.

Development of Self-Confidence

Between 9 and 18 months, children may:	Between 16 and 36 months, children may:
Show confidence in own abilities through relationships with others.	Show confidence in own abilities through relationships with others.
Expresses desires and preferences.	Contribute own ideas, skills, and abilities to activities and experiences with adults and other children.
Seek to draw adults to objects of interest or new physical skills and attends to adults’ responses.	

Setting the Stage

Activities and materials that support the development of self-confidence:

- ◆ Activities that are slightly challenging. That means they are difficult enough to push children beyond what they can already do, while success is still within reach/reason. If children are hesitant to try activities without your help, initially provide supports to help them accomplish a task, then fade the supports overtime.
- ◆ Hands-on, child directed: give children the control or a say in what they do whenever possible (e.g., encourage them to choose the books you read or songs you sing, or let them pour the water for the plant). Offer choices throughout the day, such as “Do you want to eat your snack with the orange fork or the yellow fork today?”
- ◆ Independent routines: build time into your routines so you can slow down and let children try to do something as independently as possible (e.g., putting on a coat or hat, getting a bag from a hook, or cleaning up their own dish after meals).
 - As needed, provide supports such as visuals of routines or slight modifications to materials (e.g., thicker paint brushes that are easier to grasp) to encourage children to attempt to do things independently and set them up for success.



Intentional Teaching Practices to Support Self-Confidence

Monday OBSERVE	OBSERVE Take time to observe children’s self-confidence. Who takes risks and tries unfamiliar or difficult tasks – who has the confidence to try? Who shares their accomplishments with pride? Do the children feel confident in sharing their ideas and interests? Who can benefit from more support? Are you giving certain children more positive acknowledgement compared to others? Are there some children who rarely receive positive acknowledgement? Who can you pay closer attention to, to acknowledge positive behavior?
Tuesday FOCUS	Narrate Self-Confidence Notice and comment on children’s confidence in tasks and feelings of pride and accomplishment. <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ “Wow, you tried walking on that beam for the first time! You knew you could do it!”◆ “You did that all by yourself and you are smiling – you feel proud!” Model and narrate how to handle challenging or new situations with confidence. <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ “Hmmm, I’m not sure if I can figure out how to open this door, but I’m going to try my best! I know I can do it!” instead of, “I figured out how to get it open! Woohoo! I did it!”
Wednesday SCAFFOLD I	Promote Child Autonomy Give children a say in what happens in the classroom to let them know that you value their ideas and interests . <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Offer choices: “Should I get the soft blocks or the hard ones for us?”◆ Imitate their play: “Oh, you’re building a tall tower, fun! I’ll build too.”◆ Be flexible: “You want to move to the sand now? Okay, I’ll come with you.” Children develop confidence through repeated moments of feeling successful and competent. This comes from children completing things as independently as possible . Focus on providing support instead of solving problems or doing things for children. Watch closely so that you can provide hints or clues that help children come up with or carry out solutions or tasks on their own as much as possible. <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ A child is struggling to put on their shoe, so you hold it still but let them slide their foot in.◆ Children are trying to build a tower that keeps falling. You say, “Hmmm, I wonder if there is a way to make the bottom more stable? What do you think would happen if you moved to the table?”
Thursday SCAFFOLD II	Acknowledge Effort Focus on the effort children show more than praising the results. Praising effort encourages confidence because it lets a child know that what matters most is how hard they try (which is something they can control) rather than perfection (which isn’t always attainable). Focusing on effort builds the confidence that frees children to take risks and try new things. <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ “Wow, you are really trying hard to figure out where to put that piece. I see you keep turning it,” instead of, “You are so smart! You knew just what to do!”
Friday KEEP IT GOING	Consider what you learned from observing children on Monday as well as their reaction to your Focus and Scaffolds. Find ways to build the activities from Setting the Stage into your regular routines.