



How to build confidence and self-esteem

If you suffer from low confidence and self-esteem, your negativity could have a knock-on effect on your child. Use our action checklist to cut out self-criticism – and give your child’s body confidence a boost, too.

Are you a body-basher?

You may tell your child they’re beautiful every day. But if they hear you constantly criticising your own body, they’re likely to judge themselves in a similar way. This could undermine their confidence and self-esteem, and make them worry about their own looks.

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Dr Phillippa Diedrichs

When it comes to beauty, women are their own worst critics. According to The Dove Global Beauty and Confidence Report 2016, only 20 per cent of women in the UK have high body esteem. [Mirror, Mirror](#), a review of research published by the Social Issues Research Centre, reveals that women are much more critical of their appearance than men, and much less likely to admire what they see in the mirror.

“We need to become more aware of the negative comments we make about our own bodies or the way we criticise our own eating patterns, as this insecurity can be picked up by our daughters,” says research health psychologist Dr Phillippa Diedrichs. “Feeling comfortable and valuing your own body might be tricky in today’s culture, but the more positive and caring you can be to yourself and the way you look, the easier it will be for your daughter to develop confidence about her own body.”

Don’t teach your child self-criticism

If you’re not one of the fortunate one in five who likes their looks, then it’s time to consider the impact your body-bashing might be having on your daughter.



“Many women make these kinds of comments without even realising, but they can pass on a subliminal message to our daughters, making them believe it’s natural, even encouraged, for a girl to be critical of, and unhappy with, her own body,” says Diedrichs.

[A recent UK government inquiry](#), Reflections on Body Image: Report from the All Party Parliamentary Group on Body Image, found that comments like these are picked up on and mimicked by children. The Adverse Effects of Social Pressure to be Thin on Young Women: An Experimental Investigation of the Effects of “Fat Talk” [showed](#) that women only need to hear another woman talking like this for three to five minutes before their own body confidence decreases.

So what can we do to help our children not pick up this attitude?

How to gain confidence by being kinder to yourself

It’s not always easy to show a positive attitude about your body in front of your child – especially if you don’t feel it. But by making an effort to improve your own outward body confidence, you’ll help your child feel positive about their body, too.

Once you’ve ditched the negative comments, get positive. If you like the shape of your hips or how strong you feel after a gym session, say so. If you think your new haircut or dress suits you, or that you’re a caring and funny person, remark on it. You may feel self-conscious at first, but the new assured you will work wonders on your self-esteem – and your child’s, too.



Be aware of throwaway comments

Think about how you talk about and critique your body in front of your child. If you often say things like: “Do you think these jeans make me look fat?”, “I’ve got to do something about this muffin-top” or “My hair looks awful at the moment”, it’s time to drop the negative comments

Be kind to yourself

Smile at yourself in the mirror and focus on at least one thing every day that you like about yourself and the way you look

Get positive

Start saying positive things about your body and personality out loud. The more you say it, the more likely you are to believe it

Write yourself a message

Write positive messages about how you look and how you’d like to feel on sticky notes and stick them around your house. Messages like “Hello gorgeous” or “You’re perfect just the way you are” are great reminders for both you and your child

Next Steps

- Chat with your child. Do they think you criticise yourself a lot? How does it make them feel?
- Agree a pact that they’ll gently pick you up every time you’re unkind to yourself? Maybe if you go a whole week without self-criticising, the two of you can enjoy a shared treat