

Raising Confident Children

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May is recognised as Childs' Month in Jamaica and the national initiative uses the opportunity to prioritise the needs and rights of children. We often teach our children how to be a good citizen – polite, responsible, and kind. As we celebrate and honour our children, I would like to suggest that we consider a quality that is often overlooked – being confident. I was listening in on one of my daughter's classes where the children were asked to choose an animal that best describes them. My then, nine-year old daughter responded – "I am a lioness because I am fearless, strong, proud, and I like to lead."

I smiled to myself, taking all the credit for raising such a self-assured, confident child. She was totally unfazed by the giggles in the Zoom room and unbothered by the fact that she was new to the school and had not yet made any friends. It is important to teach our children confidence. They need this quality very early as well; at the baby stage, they learn new skills about how to survive as an independent being without the protection of the womb.

As parents, it is our responsibility to facilitate their growth by encouraging confidence. A child taking his/her first step must have the confidence that he/she can walk alone and not fall. As they grow older, new skills are acquired to thrive; falling from a bike does not mean that they should stop trying to ride, but instead, must be encouraged to get up and go again.

Fostering positive confidence in our children is as necessary as food and clothing, especially in this age of social media where baby albums are on display for the world to see.

How do we teach our children confidence?

My older daughter was a very confident toddler; she had all my attention, and I was her constant cheerleader. As she got older, her level of confidence waned. It was my fault completely - I stopped raining her with praises for her efforts and started focusing on what she could do better. I failed to notice that she was shrivelling under my critical gaze and became vulnerable to peer pressure at school and society's demands. I was, unknowingly passing on some of my own insecurities about not being good enough. It was she who 'woke me up', with a reminder – that she likes to read but not the books I kept purchasing. It struck me that perhaps I should ask what she enjoys doing and she told me she loved sports and books with animals. I started allowing her to choose her own books and allowed her to participate in sporting activities and she got her smile back. She was happy and my lesson was that as much as it is necessary to guide our children, we should allow them to be their own individual and giving them the room to express themselves.

Another way to teach confidence is to model confidence ourselves. Allow them to see your fears or anxieties and show them how you overcome them. They should know that all is not perfect and making mistakes is human. The metaphor of the bicycle is a good lesson, when you fall, get back on it and enjoy the ride. Allow them to explore different things and take note of what they enjoy doing most. I look for cues like how excited they get to prepare for their activities. Kenya loves to dance and so she wakes up very early on Saturdays and checks the time - It is the only day I do not have to tell her to get ready. She looks forward to it and has developed a discipline for her rehearsals that assures me she is serious about it. I remember my attempt to take her to a 10am party at the movies one

Saturday and her simple response was– “Mommy, dancing is more important I will go to the party after dancing finish”. Encouraging children develops a sense of purpose also builds confidence. Unlike passion or ambition which are both about self, purpose focuses on the needs of others and the wider world. Help them cultivate meaning in life by having conversations about the world and how they can use their passion to make the world a better place. My older daughter loves dancing and wants to open a dance studio for children who do not have access to training. Teaching them to be conscious of the world around them will encourage empathy and they will develop the confidence to do things that will make a difference in the world.

Raising children is no small feat and parents must create a better world for everyone by consciously raising happy, confident children.

Coleen Douglas is a mother of two girls, and a lover of culture and people. She is an Arts Marketing Specialist and Educator. You may share your thoughts or own experiences with her at coleenantoinette@gmail.com.