

Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis

Studia Technica VIII (2015)

Joanna Hudy, Wiktor Hudy

Self-esteem and forming of the child's personal boundaries in the parenting process

"There is no value-judgment more important to a man -- no factor more decisive in his psychological development and motivation -- than the estimate he passes on himself".

Nathaniel Branden [2].

Introduction

Education has a huge impact on the child's self-esteem, it is an undeniable fact. Children are born completely confident. They are not restricted by their body or the constant – successful or not – attempts to explore the world around them. Parental attempts to teach children behaviour accepted by them and society are often the main cause of decline in the child's self-esteem. Everything that parents say and do, the way they do it, and the look which they bestow upon the child affect how the child will be thinking of itself in the future. At the other extreme of low self-esteem there is high one. Child – by incompetent praising – can learn to think of itself completely uncritically. For self-esteem to be at the correct level, parents need to learn the proper approach to children. For this approach consists primarily of respect for the feelings of the child, the right to refuse and its borders. This article shows that the adequate process of forming the boundaries results in a healthy self-esteem of a child.

Self-esteem and feelings of acceptance

"Self-esteem (...) It is confidence in the efficacy of our mind, in our ability to think. By extension, it is confidence in our ability to learn, make appropriate choices and decisions, and respond effectively to change. It is also the experience that success, achievement, fulfilment – happiness – are right and natural for us" [9]. Such trust is only found in child whose parents or guardians based their approach to the child on respect and acceptance of his feelings. Through careful listening, emphasizing an understanding of what your child is feeling, naming his feelings and empathic responses, the child feels loved, understands its feelings and learns to deal with them [3]. A child whose feelings are accepted may trust to its feelings, and thus itself. Self-confidence about their feelings, and as a consequence also the assessment of its

own capabilities, strengthen the child's self-esteem. A parent who accepts the feelings of the child, gives the child the message that the child is important to him and its feelings and thoughts are also important. Feelings of acceptance accompanying this respect teaches children self-respect. "I am important for the parent" equals "I am important", "My issues are important to a parent" – "My issues are important", "Parent respects my feelings" – "I trust my feelings."

Self-esteem and praise

Praise is seemingly one-sided statement of praising. In fact, praise contains the statement of praising person and its reception, the inner child respond. That's what the praising says has a huge impact on what the praised thinks, what lessons about itself he draws from this praise. When a child is told: "You are a master at this game," it is not possible that the child will think the same about itself, instead, begins to see the deficiencies in his game and does not agree with this assessment itself. For praise to be effective and do not harm, it cannot be critical or evaluative. Evaluative praise is not helpful, "(...) creates anxiety, invites dependency, and evokes defensiveness. It is nonconductive to self-reliance, self-direction and self-control. These qualities demand freedom from outside judgment. They require reliance on inner motivation and evaluation. Children cannot be subjected to pressure of evaluative praises, to other people do not become a source of external approval for them"[8]. Evaluative praise often utilizes superlatives like "wonderful", "marvellous". Instead of evaluative praise, the child should hear a descriptive one. This could be a description of what the parent sees or feels, or enumeration activities that contributed to the commendable behaviour [3]. Praise is a lot harder to parents than criticizing. However, improper praise with excessive criticism can cause serious harm to the child's self-esteem. Evaluative praise arouses suspicion in the child, what parent really likes, which raises the question: "What actually is liked, maybe something I do not like?". To be meaningful, praise should contain facts or be a personal expression of satisfaction that something has been done, for example "I like your drawing, everything on it is so colourful." The child then has a chance to draw a conclusion about himself: "I am a capable painter". Evaluation praise is just as harmful as criticism, because it both assesses personality traits and character of the child. Praise assessment has therefore a negative impact on the child's self-esteem. Proper praise is this, which leaves the child space to infer positive conclusions about himself, calms the child and allows him to think of himself well, strengthens the child's self-esteem.

Self-esteem and discipline and punishment

The word "discipline" is not associated with respect to the disciplined, all the more to his feelings. All disciplines are different types of forms of coercion, which by definition do not respect children's right to a different opinion and refusal. "For what is the discipline? It is the training of the mind and character of the child so that, in effect, learned self-control, self-discipline and become a constructive member

of society. Punishment is only a small part of the discipline and the most negative. Parents should know that the first and most important part of good discipline is to make the child feel truly loved and accepted" [7]. Assessing, comparing, criticizing, labelling are kind of messages which have a very negative impact on the child's self-esteem. "Words have the power to build and stimulate action or intimidation and destruction. When we recognize and appreciate the efforts of the children, helping them to gain greater hope and self-confidence. In turn, when we evaluate a child, arouse in him anxiety and opposition. (...) When problems arise, try to find solutions for them, instead of blaming the child and criticize them. Even the inevitable anger may proceed without name calling and blaming. For the ability of communication, based on the care and understanding, should become a deep respect for the child" [8]. What is more, the penalty does not bring the desired effect, because the child – instead of drawing conclusions from the act, which we did not like – mostly focuses on the thoughts of retaliation and revenge, "I'll show them." Punishments humiliate and they also rely on taking the child the pleasure slack unconnected with the done – according to parent improperly – matter. Penalties are also unfair and unjust, because the child is doing something for the first time of goodwill and error is often due to ignorance of what the parents like or do not like, and secondly because of unmet emotional needs. In the first case the punishment violates the child's self-esteem because of his good intentions did not gain understanding and feels worse, because he does not know. In the second case, the child is punished de facto because of negligence of the parent, who has not satisfied the child's basic emotional needs, and do not accept the way in which the child claims meeting those needs. The child gets the message that his attempts are inappropriate and that is what it feels is inappropriate. Wrong means worse, bad, inadequate.

Self-esteem and the formation of boundaries

As mentioned above, the proper self-esteem depends on child's feelings of acceptance by the parents. This often raises parents questions, whether it could not get too excessive indulgence as a consequence. It is worthy to know that parents should accept all the feelings of the child, but did not approve of and consent to all behaviours. Parents should tell the child what they do not like, what behaviours they do not want, do not like. Jasper Juul, writing about the boundaries in the upbringing of children, states that the current boundaries are becoming more subjective and saying to child what we like and do not like is already defining of boundaries [4]. Children will be testing these boundaries because they want to know who and what his parents are. On the other hand, parents can afford just to not deal with this childish testing boundaries. What for parents comes as an automatic reaction when they lose patience is screaming and enforcing obedience. These methods of disciplining children often violate the dignity, the boundaries of the child and not respect his feelings and the right to refuse. It turns out that restrictions could be put in a way that will teach the child self-discipline over time, and what's more the child will

learn from their own behaviour, while respecting the child and his rights. Robert J. MacKenzie writes that "Effective teaching requires a balance between firmness and respect" [1]. This process takes place when parents accept the feelings of children. Acceptance of feelings is an introduction to dialogue and contact with the child. It only guarantees a real understanding of the child needs, and consequently to know their own child by parents, thus putting the broad boundaries. From the child's perspective, understanding received from parents makes children more likely to agree to restrictions placed on them, following the parent as a guide. "The more it feels (child – author's note) loved, the more identified with their parents, the more likely it is modelled on them, take their intellectual and spiritual leadership" [7]. When the child feels unloved, it is quite the opposite: "If it does not feel loved, it reacts to parental commands and system of values with anger, and sharper cases develop an attitude of rebellion against all authority – visible especially during teenage years. It is then much less inclined to follow the guidelines of the parents, more – to do everything the other way around" [7].

Conclusion

Penalties and evaluative praise adversely affect the child's self-esteem. What guarantees the correct build of self-esteem in the child is feelings of acceptance by the parent and consistent, based on the trust to children's feelings, formation of boundaries. If there is praise, it is only a descriptive praise or one expressed from the perspective of "I", praising the satisfaction of a completed task. The key role is played here by the acceptance of children's feelings by their parents. Acceptance of feelings gives respect to the child's feelings and things. It involves listening and recognizing children's feelings, because it results in the knowledge of the child, which allows for building a close relationship, based on understanding. This makes the child feel loved, and in these conditions set by the parents, and counting with the needs of the child, the child's boundaries are more readily accepted.

References

- [1] MacKenzie R.J., *Kiedy pozwolić? Kiedy zabronić?*, GWP, Sopot 2013.
- [2] Branden N., *6 filarów poczucia własnej wartości*, Wyd. Ravi, Łódź 1998.
- [3] Faber A., Mazlish E., *Jak mówić, żeby dzieci nas słuchały. Jak słuchać, żeby dzieci do nas mówiły*, Media Rodzina, Poznań 2013.
- [4] Juul J., *Agresja – nowe tabu*, Wydawnictwo MiND, Podkowa Leśna 2013.
- [5] Cloud H., Townsend J., *Sztuka mówienia „nie”*, Świat Książki, Warszawa 1997.
- [6] Wróbel A., *Asertywność na co dzień, czyli jak żyć w zgodzie ze sobą i innymi*, Samo Sedno, Warszawa 2011.
- [7] Koźmińska I., Campbell R., *Czy umiemy kochać dzieci? – wywiad z dr. Rossem Campbellem*, Niebieska Linia. 2001, 5.
- [8] Ginott H.G., Ginott A., Goddard H.W., *Między rodzicami a dziećmi. Przyjazne kontakty z pociechami*, Sensus.
- [9] Branden N., *Jak dobrze być sobą. O poczuciu własnej wartości*, GWP, Sopot 2007.

Abstract

Education should establish a balance between firmness and respect for children to have proper self-esteem. It often happens that when there is discipline, there is no respect, which lowers the self-esteem of the child. When there is respect, there is no discipline. Respectable discipline is possible, but only if the parents accept the child's feelings, so that they know and understand that their own child and his needs. In return, the child opens up to the contact with the parents and willingly accepts borders given by the parents. A parent becomes a child's guide.

Key words: self-esteem, feelings of acceptance, boundaries

Joanna Hudy, Wiktor Hudy
Pedagogical University of Cracow
Institute of Technology
ul. Podchorążych 2
30-084 Kraków, Poland