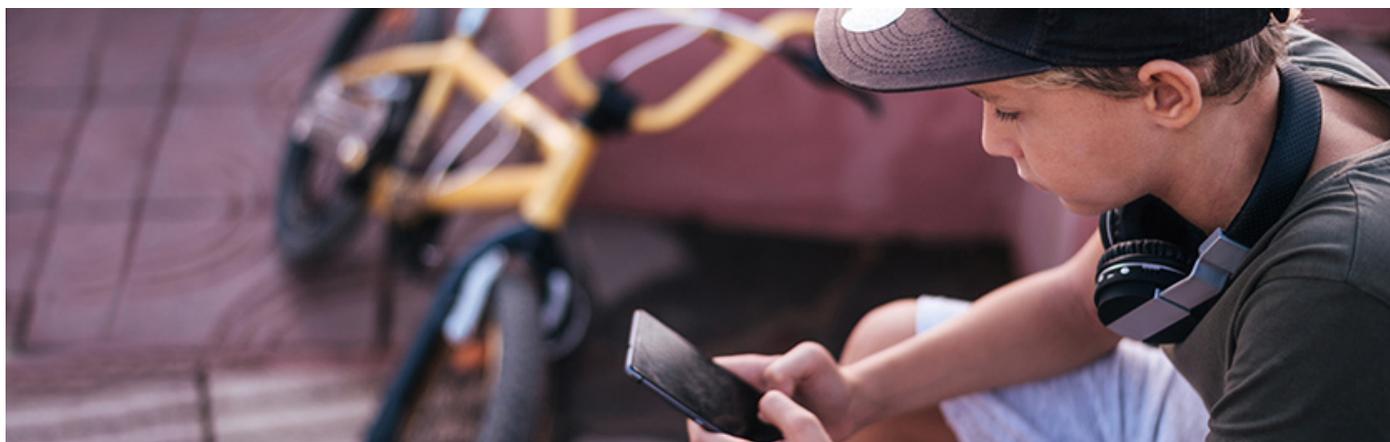


INSIGHTS

Strengthening kids' self-esteem in a digital world



How do we develop and nurture our child's self-esteem in a world where the likes, comments and followers are often seen as the social currency for popularity, confidence and self-worth?

While young people live out much of their social lives online, there are certain elements of this world that can have a negative impact on the social and emotional wellbeing of young people, particularly if that person's self-esteem is already fragile.

The very connected, very visible and public nature of social media ensures that many of the challenges faced by young people previously are now magnified and felt more deeply when played out online. We need to give young people the confidence, skills and perspective to ensure that they can reduce the negative impacts, and instead learn to thrive both online and in real life.

What are some of the things we can do to help nurture that self-esteem and prepare them for the challenges of a very public social media?

Build their independence and resilience early

Make sure they are confident in their own abilities to problem solve themselves. Let them to do things that may result in failure but allows them to pick themselves up. Let them know that mistakes are OK, as long as we learn something from them.

Encourage activities and pursuits

Feeling part of a community can be an invaluable element to fostering self-worth. Encourage kids to have interests away from the screens, such as belonging to teams, clubs and groups where their achievements and efforts can be recognised and celebrated.

Provide opportunities for them to help others

Giving kids the opportunity to help others, such as coaching a junior team, helping out with training or helping people less fortunate are great ways to build self-worth. Developing empathy for others helps kids to realise that the world is a much larger place than their social media feeds.

Spend time with them

It is easy to spend time with our kids when they are young. We can take them to the park, play games, read them books. As they get older and we are not so cool to hang out with, it becomes trickier. But we need to look for times to spend just being together, whether that's watching a movie they like, playing a game, or grabbing a milkshake on the way home from sports training. Find things they like to do. Even just sitting on their bed at night and letting them know you are there can be beneficial.

Provide rituals

Having regular moments of connection that are part of their everyday can be critical in providing stability and security. Connecting as a family with a nightly meal has been proven to be an effective way to give kids the comfort of knowing they have a place that is familiar and safe and unconditional. Or look for other rituals to provide this security.

Communicate often about what is happening online

Talk to them about the things you see online, let them know you have an understanding, learn about it and be sure to look at things from their perspective. Use teachable moments to highlight when things go wrong and be sure that you remain relevant to their world so that they know you are there should something go wrong.

While we cannot always be there to follow everywhere they go online and be up to date on every single site or app they visit, we can do a lot in terms of instilling good values, building that self-esteem and ensuring that they have a positive sense of self that transfers from the real world to wherever they find themselves online.



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Martine is a parent educator and a youth and family counsellor who speaks, writes and consults on the challenges faced by families in the modern world. Martine has a Masters in Counselling and a background in secondary education. Through her personal and professional work with families raising children, she recognises the important role technology plays in the social and emotional wellbeing of young people. Martine is an accredited speaker with the Office of the eSafety Commissioner.