

SELF-WORTH

What is this developmental skill?

Self-worth is a child's belief that they are valuable, lovable, and deserving of care simply because they exist. It is not based on achievements, behavior, or success, but on the understanding that every person has inherent value.

How does this normally develop?

Children develop self-worth through consistent experiences of being loved, comforted, and accepted by caring adults. When caregivers respond with warmth, delight in their child, and remain connected even after mistakes, children begin to believe, "I matter, and I am worthy of love."

How can neglect interfere?

Neglect can leave children feeling invisible or unimportant. When their needs are repeatedly overlooked, children may conclude that they are not worthy of attention or care. These beliefs often become deeply rooted and may continue even after they enter safe, nurturing relationships.

What might this look like?

A child may:

- Frequently criticize themselves.
- Reject compliments or praise.
- Believe they are a burden.
- Expect rejection from others.
- Apologize excessively or blame themselves for problems.

Parenting Implications

Separate your child's worth from their behavior. Correct inappropriate behavior while consistently communicating, "I love you, even when I don't like your choices." Notice and celebrate who your child is—not just what they accomplish.

From Understanding to Attunement

Children begin to value themselves when they repeatedly experience being valued by others. Every caring interaction reinforces the message that your child matters.