

Fostering Self-Esteem Ages 9–11: What Caregivers Need to Know



The Foundation of Self-Esteem

A child's self-esteem comes down to how they answer two core questions – and this stage is a powerful time to help shape those answers.

"Am I capable of handling this task?"

Built through experience, encouragement, and being allowed to try – and sometimes fail – safely.

"Am I valued no matter what?"

Shaped by the emotional safety and unconditional warmth children receive from the adults who matter most.

Social Comparison & the Inner Voice



Forming a Sense of Self

Kids this age develop a more stable identity – often through comparing themselves to peers.



The Inner Voice

Their internal voice starts to echo what they've heard from others – making adult feedback especially powerful.



Effort vs. Identity

This is the moment to help them separate their effort – and the outcomes of their efforts – from their identity.

Responding to Setbacks

When something doesn't go the way they hoped – like not making the soccer team – **your response matters**. Regulate your own feelings of disappointment first, then offer something like:

"That's hard to do – you put in a lot of effort, and it didn't turn out how you hoped. I'm proud of you for trying something challenging. If you want to try again next season, I'll be right there with you."

This tells them their worth – and your love – isn't tied to outcomes. You still see their strength.

Curiosity Over Correction



Ask Open-Ended Questions

Instead of jumping to judgment or praise, try: *"What part of that felt hard?"* and *"What are you most proud of?"*



Accountability Without Shame

If they forgot homework, calmly ask: *"What got in the way?"* – then help them figure out what to do differently next time.



Encourage New Experiences

Let them try something unfamiliar or creative – without performance pressure. Their value comes from being brave enough to try, not from being the best.

Signs Your Child May Need More Support

These are signals – not failures – and chances to tune in more closely.



Negative Self-Talk

Frequently saying "I can't do anything right" or dismissing their own abilities.



Perfectionism

Preoccupied with getting everything right; struggles to tolerate mistakes or imperfection.



Low Persistence

Gives up quickly or refuses to try things they might not excel at immediately.



Peer Sensitivity

Extra sensitive to what peers think; acts out or shuts down in settings where they feel compared.



Emotional Shutdown

Shuts down during homework time or becomes avoidant when facing a challenge.

- ✔ What they'll carry with them isn't just what you said when they succeeded – it's **how you responded when they struggled**. Your steady, warm presence teaches them: *"I can handle hard things. And I'm still loved and valued, even when things don't go my way."* Reach out to your Ollie team anytime you need support!

References

References: American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), American Psychological Association (APA), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Zero to Three, HealthySteps, Children's Hospital Colorado, Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, Boston Children's Hospital.