

The Value of Optimism

Optimism involves expecting positive outcomes, and seeing set-backs as temporary and a normal part of life. Optimism influences how people respond to life's difficulties.

- ▶ Children who have more optimistic thinking are more resilient and less likely to give up in the face of challenge. Resilience is the ability to bounce back from a difficulty, which is a critical factor in long-term success and well-being. Children who are more optimistic are also more likely to feel a sense of control in their lives, which can lead to less anxiety and greater self-confidence.
- ▶ Optimism isn't something you either have or don't have. It can be taught and practiced..

One of the most important habits that children can develop is optimism.

"What is one thing I do each day to help my children succeed? I am positive in the morning when my kids are getting up. I reinforce the good for the day ahead."

Input from a parent at a November 2024 First Nations Parents Workshop

"I think one of the best things we can do to encourage educational success is to focus on the positives. We have to be optimistic. If our kids feel hopeful, they will do better. When we believe in our children's talents and what they can do, they will believe in themselves, and others will believe in them, too."

Input from a parent at a November 2024 First Nations Parents Workshop

What can parents do to encourage an optimistic outlook?

- ▶ **Model being optimistic.** If children hear lots of optimistic comments, they are more likely to develop this way of thinking themselves.
 - Look for and point out the bright side of experiences.
 - Try to find the positive even when things haven't gone well.
 - When children are regularly exposed to optimistic thinking, they are more likely to believe in their own abilities and develop stronger problem-solving skills.
- ▶ **Use positive self-talk.** When things are difficult, say out loud things like, "Wow. This is tough. I might make a mistake. But I can do my best and if things don't work out perfectly, I can always try something else."
- ▶ **Practice gratitude.** When we talk positively about what we are thankful for, it helps shift our thinking from problems to positives.
- ▶ **Focus on solutions, not problems.** When challenges arise, don't dwell on what went wrong; talk about how your children can overcome a mistake.
 - Whether things have gone well or badly, the most important question that parents can ask their children is "What will we do differently next time?"
 - Mistakes are just a natural part of learning. Point out what your child did well and help them self-evaluate: "What went well?" "What would I change if I could?"
- ▶ **Encourage children to set their own goals – even small ones.** When children are anxious about failing, encourage them to set reasonable targets and work out for themselves how to achieve them. Setting and achieving goals on their own gives children a sense of competence and builds their experience of success.
- ▶ **Focus on what you can control, and talk about solving issues.** If children are feeling frustrated or upset about something that has happened, it is important and beneficial to let them talk through what happened and how they feel. Learning to understand and sort through our emotions is a lifelong skill. But in time, it's useful to change focus to what you can do to move forward in a positive way.
- ▶ **Celebrate effort.** Noticing children's hard work reinforces that achievement isn't everything, and we can grow when we try.

Teaching optimism is one of the most important things that parents can do to help children's emotional well-being and self-esteem. A child who believes in their own ability to make changes and be successful, even in the face of mistakes, will have a positive view of themselves and their opportunities.

Sources:

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