

the school years toolkit

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Confidence and self esteem

Children with motor difficulties can be vulnerable due to the difficulty in attaining a level of physical competence that seems to come easily to others. They can therefore lose confidence in themselves.

“Self-esteem” refers to how we feel about ourselves and how we perceive what others think of us.

“Self-worth” is another way of describing these feelings. If we feel great about our achievements and ourselves, the inner drive to meet challenges and to succeed is reinforced.

If you have used this Advice Sheet and not seen improvement after four months, please contact CYPIT.

Developing Self Esteem

When teaching motor tasks to children, a common mistake is to have too high an expectation of the child. For example, we may have in our minds an image of a superstar tennis player and so, when teaching children how to handle a tennis racket, somehow we expect them also to be superstar tennis players.

For those children who already have difficulties achieving age-appropriate motor skills, trying to perfect complex motor skills to a level far beyond their competence is not only unrealistic but stressful and promotes a high level of frustration.

Children with such difficulties need to be able to develop motor skills at their own pace under gentle and encouraging guidance.

- Do not overload with too many instructions and avoid negative comments such as:

“Keep your eye on the ball!”

“Throw the ball up straight!”

“Follow through!”

“Don’t just stand there!”

“Don’t drop the racquet head!”

“Try harder!”

“Not that way!”

Section 5 **advice** sheets

- When teaching motor skills, focus on one aspect at a time and back it up with encouragement. Use comments like:

“Well done!”

“That’s better!”

“Try it this way”

Think about:

- Are the skills being taught age-appropriate?
- Is your child ready to attempt that level of motor competence?
- Am I giving encouraging feedback?

The main thing to remember is that your child needs their confidence boosted. The aim of encouraging specific activities is to provide the opportunity for them to practise the things that they find hard in a caring and supportive environment where there is no pressure to achieve a certain standard in a set time.

Your child needs the opportunity to practise the skills at their own pace. To boost their confidence and overcome their feelings of failure, the activities should be fun and carried out when everyone has the time and is feeling relaxed.

Praise should be given for any attempts your child makes at a motor skill that is obviously difficult for them. They need these boosts to keep practising and achieving. The aim is not to wait till the “perfect result” is achieved before credit is given but, instead, to encourage whatever attempts are made as children with these needs are prone to giving up easily.

Encouraging strengths

Every child is good at something. It is important to recognise children’s strengths and encourage their development. It is easy to focus on a child’s weaknesses and lose sight of, or overlook, potential talents and interests.

Through interests we meet others with similar interests and so friendships develop. If your child appears to be linking up with another child, encourage that child to come to your home so the common interest can be fostered. Suggest also that they come on family outings and picnics so that the children can experience the same events and “happenings” together.

Some children may be interested in collecting certain toys to make up a series, while others may gravitate towards computer games. Other children may have a vivid imagination and enjoy making up stories that can be recorded or written down. Keep your eyes open to the games and activities that your child tends naturally to gravitate towards and see if there are ways that these interests can be developed and channelled in a positive way.

Remember, the aim is to foster a positive self-esteem by giving your child the message that they are good at something and that they do have their own special gifts and talents.