



Rifka Schönfeld **STRATEGIES**

THE NEWSLETTER FOR OPTIMUM SUCCESS

TIPS ON SOCIAL SKILLS FOR ADULTS & CHILDREN

CONFIDENCE: What's the Big Deal?

Dear Readers,

This week's newsletter will discuss the topic of confidence and why it's so important...

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QUESTION:

Is confidence really so important? What's the point?



Picture this: there are children in a room, competing in a contest of who can build the best tower. The judge walks in. He walks around the room, examining the towers, and then chooses the winning tower. The child who wins stands tall, chest out, grinning at those around him. The children who did not win look away, some might try to speak but their voices will crack. Others might knock their towers over.

Are any of the “losers” still proud of their tower? Are they proud of themselves for having participated in the contest?

In her book *The Confident Child: Raising Children to Believe in Themselves*, social psychologist Terri Apter describes the above situation as part of a research experiment that she conducted in graduate school. In reality, the judge was declaring the winning tower at random. The aim of the study was to observe children’s responses to success or failure. The youngest children (two- and three-year-olds) barely responded to winning or losing, but Apter remembers observing the older children as torture. Many of the “losers” were too embarrassed to even face her and others hunched over and stared at their ankles, willing their tears to go away.

Apter uses this anecdote to begin her book on raising children with confidence in the modern age as she was heavily affected by this experience watching children gain, lose, or maintain their confidence when arbitrarily winning or losing a relatively insignificant contest. She explains that parents fight a daily internal battle to “attain a balance between teaching children that they must do their best, and teaching them that they are ‘the best’ regardless of what they do... We do have to teach our children how to achieve, and we do have to encourage them to feel better about achieving than failing. We do have to work on their behalf – and sometimes against their inclinations – to inspire them to develop their potential. But while we do this, we risk making them feel awful about themselves. This self-defeat can consume enormous energy as a child seeks to protect herself from its blows. The child can create disguises and defenses that blind us to her real feelings and real needs. To help our children sustain that vital confidence that motivates them and fills them with hope for their future selves, we have to understand what self-esteem is. For self-esteem is the key to a child’s bright future. But what is it, and how is it maintained?”

She explains that self-esteem has a huge impact on successful development, and that self esteem has more impact on a child’s growth than intelligence or natural ability. When children believe they have value and also have the skills that justify this belief, they will have greater believe in their future successes. In turn, they will work harder and longer at a task simply because they believe that they can do it, and this will ultimately ensure higher levels of performance and completion. Apter also links confidence and self-esteem to Daniel Goleman’s theory of emotional intelligence which I have written about in the past. In his book, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More than IQ*, Goleman explains his conception of emotional intelligence:

Abilities such as being able to motivate oneself and persist in the face of frustrations; to control impulse and delay gratification; to regulate one’s moods and keep distress from swamping the ability to think; to empathize and to hope... And while there are those who argue that IQ cannot be changed much by experience or education, I will show that the crucial emotional competencies can indeed be learned and improved upon by children – if we bother to teach them.

Emotional intelligence therefore grounds children as people who can interact positively with others and continue to develop even as the playing field gets more difficult and challenging.

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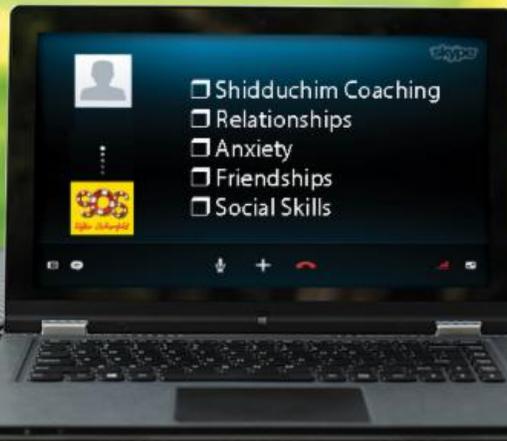


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