

Building Self Confidence

No matter where you live, raising young people who become confident, independent adults that care about their communities is a great goal. The 4-H Formula addresses the need of youth to have a sense of belonging, to display mastery of skills, to gain independence and to develop a sense of community service. One of the eight elements of achieving the 4-H Formula is building self-confidence. We know confidence when we see it and we can often identify when someone is not confident. But HOW do we help young people develop confidence? In his book, "The Good Teen," Dr. Richard Lerner outlines several tactics.

First, confidence is defined as the idea that you can achieve a goal through your actions. Someone who is confident looks at a situation in terms of how to succeed in that situation, and they may be very comfortable not having all of the answers when they start. They believe they can figure out the parts they don't know yet. Someone who is not confident may stop and start, fret over details, or may not start at all because they believe they may not be successful.

Our abilities and self-perception are very different depending on the developmental stage of the youth and this plays a large role in their confidence. At an early age, job competence (doing a job well) is less of a driver than for an older youth. According to Dr. Lerner, most youth experience different types of confidence in different situations. In other words, you may be very confident on the basketball court but may be overwhelmed in speech class or at a new job. He continues by noting that "self-confidence, like a muscle, can be built up."

He believes that self-confidence can be increased by:

- 1) **Maintaining a positive relationship.** Make sure that youth know they are loved and valued. Model healthy behaviors and, when appropriate, share stories of your own failures and how you worked through them.
- 2) **Build life skills.** When youth struggle with confidence in a certain area, help them to see other areas where they are successful. Encourage them to stretch their limits and try something related but new. Encourage them to take the confidence from previous experiences and branch out. Dr. Lerner also focuses on offering support that bolsters confidence. If a parent steps in to do a project or task, confidence is shown to decrease. Showing an interest and asking good questions about the project/task can help a youth to work their way through the learning process and gain confidence along the way.
- 3) **Give teens the opportunity to become leaders.** Providing youth with the opportunity to focus on others can be a great boost to their self-confidence. Are they active with a church group, school group, community organization where they have a purpose and experience the value of helping others? Encourage youth to research a question or problem and then discuss their findings. Model healthy behavior. I occasionally find myself being really hard on ME and using words to describe myself that I wouldn't say to or about anyone else. That is when I know that my own confidence is slipping and I need to work on my perceptions.

Dr. Lerner also addresses the impact of stressful situations on confidence. When we are placed in a situation that is new and stressful, we often don't know how to rely on previous experiences to help us. Especially for youth, this can be overwhelming. Share experiences of trying something new and whether or not it was successful; and what you would do differently if given the opportunity. One of my favorite things about 4-H is the increased opportunity for youth to develop as leaders. Many start in their clubs as the recreation or song leader and that confidence helps them to take on increasingly responsible roles. As they grow, these experiences and the confidence lets them begin to reach beyond their club and hold roles in 4-H Council, Junior Leaders, and Ambassadors.

Helping youth to live up to their potential should be a goal for all of us. The high school junior may be mayor some day or the shy sixth-grader may be our next doctor or business owner. Helping them develop the confidence to explore their world and abilities is a great step in success for our communities. If you are interested in getting involved with 4-H, please reach out to McKenzie Smithson, Butler County 4-H & Youth Development Agent at 316-321-9660.