

# Nurture Your Child's Healthy Sense of Self:

An Ultimate "How to" Guide for Parents



Healthy Sense of Self



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## Introduction

As a parent, you worry about your child, right? It's your job. You worry about their safety and happiness, you worry whether or not they're lonely and whether they'll feel fulfilled as an adult. You worry about how to be a good parent. And you're not alone—all parents worry about doing a good job!

Your responsibilities go beyond caring for your child's physical needs. You also need to fulfill their emotional needs, and the most significant part of that job is nurturing your child's natural sense of Self. Their future health and happiness depend upon you providing the building blocks for the Sense of Self (SoS) that will support them through all the ups and downs they will face in life.

## What is a Natural Sense of Self?

A Natural Sense of Self is the inner knowing that you exist as an emotionally, mentally, and physically independent person—regardless of what anyone else may think, feel, or say about you.

If your child has a Natural Sense of Self, they will be:

- Self-confident
- Self-compassionate
- Aware of their desires and limits
- Able to focus and achieve their goals
- Less prone to depression, anxiety, and self-sabotage



If your child lacks a healthy Sense of Self, they will:

- Lack self-confidence
- Lack compassion for their Self and others.
- Feel unsure about their limits, abilities, needs, and wants
- Lack clear focus and base their goals on pleasing others and meeting unreasonable expectations
- Be more likely to develop emotional issues and engage in self-destructive behaviors

## Mirroring and the Sense of Self

A child's Sense of Self develops out of the messages they receive from parents or primary caretakers in a subtle yet powerful process known as mirroring. It's important to know that this development happens in the first few years of a child's life, and on a mutually subconscious level—neither parent nor child is aware of the messages being passed between them.

The mirroring process can go one of two ways.

The parent may convey to the child that he or she is accepted, acknowledged, and loved no matter what. In this scenario, the child is acknowledged as an independent person with his or her own needs and desires that may not always be compatible with those of the parent.

Alternatively, the parent may let the child know that temporary acceptance and approval are rewards that depend on their performance and behavior. The child is expected to fulfill the parent's own emotional needs by adhering to a "distorted" reflection: that of a child who does not deserve unconditional love, but rather one who must work towards pleasing their parent to prove they are worthy of love.

In the second scenario, the child is treated as an extension of the parent, an unhealthy state known as enmeshment.

The child's continual efforts to earn approval result in the growth of a Substitute Sense of Self.



## How to Recognize a Substitute Sense of Self

It can be difficult to know when your child is living with a Substitute Sense of Self (SSoS) because it manifests differently in each individual. Where one child may be subdued and compliant, another may act out at every opportunity. Where one will dislike school and exert the minimum effort, another will be a relentless overachiever.

Here are some personality traits and behaviors that often betray the presence of a SSoS:

- Social anxiety
- Low self-worth
- Perfectionism and inflexibility
- Overly self-critical
- Angry, sulky, or violent
- Mood is drastically affected by the mood of their parents or others around them
- Constantly seeking to score attention or approval

## What Is Approval-Seeking Behavior?

Sometimes a child's motivation for engaging in a behavior or action won't be for their own enjoyment or gratification, but instead as a way to win approval or simply to be seen and feel accepted. Just as a Substitute Sense of Self manifests differently from child to child, so will his or her tactics to get your approval and attention. Ways of obtaining approval and/or attention could include:

- Completing homework or chores on time, ahead of time, or without being asked
- Presenting test scores, report cards, or awards for your approval
- Throwing temper tantrums
- Disruptive behavior at school

Not every child who demonstrates the above tendencies lacks a Sense of Self, but if your child displays these types of behaviors, take note of the frequency and how dependent they are on the outcome. If your child is constantly trying to get your attention or approval, it could be part of their Early Childhood Survival Strategy, and a warning sign that their Sense of Self is highly dependent on external approval.

## Approval-Hungry Children Become Approval-Seeking Adults

Addiction to approval is not something your child will naturally grow out of without intervention and reconditioning. The presence of an Internalized Parent Voice (IPV) prevents you from clearly hearing the inner voice of your Self, or even from being able to recognize it as your own. When you live with an IPV, you never know whether your accomplishments or your very being will ever be enough, and you depend on the opinions of others to make you feel (temporarily) okay. Addiction to approval continues into adulthood and has lifelong consequences, which could include:

- Social anxiety
- Toxic relationships
- Professional aimlessness or burnout
- Substance abuse
- Inability to parent in a healthy manner



## 3 Ways to Nurture Your Child's Natural Sense of Self

Children with low self-worth tend to experience higher levels of anxiety, which traps them in a vicious cycle of feeling increasingly helpless and unable to deal with challenges both big and small. It's often said that self-confidence is key to a child's wellbeing and success. So what can you do to ensure your child recognizes what a unique and lovable individual they really are?

Here are a few practices you can adopt now to invest in your child's present and future.

- 1. Praise your child, not your child's performance.**
  - When your child expresses disappointment in their performance, try to praise the work and effort they put into doing their best, rather than focusing on the results (like saying to them: *it's no big deal, I know you'll do better next time*).

- 2. Show your unconditional love and support.**
  - Failure to get the result they want is a big deal for your child, and it's important not to dismiss their disappointment. Listening to your child and giving them space to actively think through their experience and their reaction to it is a great way of showing—not telling—them that you see, accept, and acknowledge them as an independent person with a right to their own opinions and feelings. Accepting failure is an important part of building self-confidence, and letting your child know you're proud of them no matter what will help them take future failures in stride, keeping them in perspective.

- 3. Be mindful of your own behavior.**
  - This ties in with compassionate and open communication. Understand that your outbursts have real consequences—yelling at your child, for example, may sometimes carry the same emotional impact as hitting them. Or when your child has to compete with your cell phone for your attention, they get the message that they're less important to you than your phone.



## Cultivating Your Own Sense of Self

Your behaviors and inner thoughts provide a glimpse into the state of your own Sense of Self. When you lose your temper with your child, what are you really angry about? Is it about your child or is it related to something else? Monitoring your own behavior, the frequency you find yourself feeling angry at your child, and looking within to find the cause of that anger can help you determine if you're living with a Substitute Sense of Self.



When you have a Healthy Sense of Self, your child has a better chance at developing a Natural Sense of Self and leading a happy, healthy, successful life. Get the tools you need to love yourself unconditionally so you can lead your child by example.

To learn more about the Sense of Self (SoS) Method, visit our website.

[www.HealthySenseOfSelf.com](http://www.HealthySenseOfSelf.com)