



Being ME

A kid's guide to
boosting confidence
and self-esteem

by Wendy L. Moss, PhD

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Part one



KNOW
About
Confidence

Chapter 1

What Really Is Confidence?

So you want to build up your confidence. That's a great goal! But what exactly is confidence? Lots of kids struggle to define it. And it's hard for kids (and adults) to gain more confidence if they're not sure what it is. In this chapter, you will learn about confidence and how kids explain what it feels like to have it.

Recognize Confidence

Do you know people who have a lot of confidence? Close your eyes and take a minute to picture them. What words would you use to describe these confident folks?

Which of the kids below sound confident to you?

- the popular quarterback on the football team
- the straight A student
- the C student who's won a few drawing contests
- the student with okay grades who volunteers at an animal shelter
- the kid who gets A's and B's in school, has two close friends, and loves hip-hop

Tough decision, huh? It could be all these kids—or none at all. Why is that? Well, confidence isn't determined by what you do. It's determined by how you feel. Hank, a popular quarterback, might seem like he has lots of confidence, but he always feels like he just gets lucky in games when he plays well. Hank says, "I'm always worried that I'll mess up in the next game and no one will like me anymore."

In general, confidence can be defined in any or all of the following ways:

- You usually believe in yourself and like who you are.
- You believe that you can handle challenging situations, either by using your own problem-solving skills or by asking for help.
- You can laugh at yourself when you make mistakes and you work to correct them, without feeling bad about yourself.

Basically, confidence doesn't mean that you are better than anybody else, but that you are okay with being you. It also means that you don't need to knock down other people (physically or verbally) in order to



How would you define confidence?

feel good about yourself. Confident kids can compliment other people and still feel good about themselves. Confident kids can also admit to needing help at times, and to having both strengths (abilities) and weaknesses (areas that they are not yet super good at).

Do you beat yourself up when you make a mistake? Do you tell yourself that you're stupid or a bad person or just not good enough?

You may like these ways of explaining confidence, or you might want to stick with your own definition. There's no one right answer here. Many kids include words like "self-esteem," "comfortable," and "happy" in their definitions.

Afraid of Mistakes?

What happens when you try really hard but you make a mistake? The million dollar question here is: Can kids feel good about themselves, even though they're not perfect and sometimes make really noticeable mistakes? What do you think?



Well, human beings make mistakes. It's just a fact of life. Even the most confident person has likely made a bunch of mistakes. The important thing, and you've probably heard this tons of times already, is that you learn from your mistakes. And that you don't get down on yourself for them. If you need to work on making fewer mistakes, you can still feel good about yourself in the process because you're working to improve yourself (we'll talk about this a lot more in Part 2).

Mary's Story

Mary loved to read and easily read the words in the books that her teacher picked for all the students to read in class. But when it was Mary's turn to read aloud, she started sweating, felt nervous, and excused herself to go to the bathroom. Mary said, "I was afraid of looking stupid. It would have been so bad if I made a mistake. I couldn't take that chance."

Mary's self-doubts kept her from showing her reading skills, an area that she had worked on. Teddy *did* read in class, and even though he knew how to read the words, he mispronounced one of them. Another kid corrected him. Teddy said, "I thought it was actually funny that I misread the word. It wasn't even a big word. It was no big deal, though. And so what! I know I'll never mess up on that same word again. And, I'm cool with me, so I'm cool with knowing that I'm not perfect."

How would you have handled this situation? If Mary felt self-confident, do you think she would have handled the situation differently?

Do You Believe in Yourself?

Everyone has a few areas that they struggle with, whether it's a sport, organizational skills, a school subject, or another area. Some kids find it hard to talk to other kids, make friends, or may feel uncomfortable in any kind of social situation. It can be really frustrating when you focus on what is hard for you and forget to spend time focusing on what you can do and what is special about you.



Cassandra's List

Cassandra was able to make a list of the problems she was getting into because of her thinking (or negative self-talk). Here is her list:

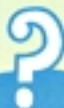
- I forgot that I do have special qualities. I'm nice and funny and a good listener.
- I was only focusing on my area of weakness, my shyness.
- I really knew that not all kids were super outgoing or had tons of friends, but I kept thinking that I was the only one who wasn't popular.
- Trashing myself took the pressure off me. I didn't have to try hard to make friends because I thought that no one liked me, so trying would be a waste of time.
- I was starting to think my whole life was useless just because I was shy.

Cassandra's change of thinking didn't happen overnight. It took time for her to really begin to believe in herself.

Can you think of ways you think about yourself that might cause problems?

What's Your Comfort Zone?

Have you ever heard the expression "being out of your comfort zone"? It just means that you're doing something that isn't very comfortable for you. When you grow from being a little kid to a tween to a preteen and then a teenager, you may notice that you feel less comfortable during these times of change. Or when you try something new or something scary, like giving a report in class when you're shy or running for a spot on the student government



How would you describe a confident person?

when you're new to a school. Change and new things can bring a sense of excitement and make your daily life very interesting, but it can also make you somewhat uncomfortable. Staying in your comfort zone may be safe, but you may also miss out on the great things that changing and taking healthy risks can lead to for you.

Bradley never wanted to try a new sport or group activity because he thought he wouldn't do well. He explained, "I was afraid other kids would think I was pathetic. I had that fear a lot."

Bradley talked to an adult who helped him to focus on his strengths and to question the reality of his fears. Bradley later said, "I knew that none of my friends automatically became amazing at a sport until they practiced, so why did I think I had to be perfect right from the start? I told myself that I'm brave to try new things, that I have things I'm already good at, and that I don't want to miss out on doing cool stuff just because I'm sometimes a little out of my comfort zone."

With a little practice, Bradley was able to handle a challenging situation and ask for help. He took small steps to build confidence.

Different Kinds of Confidence

There are two main kinds of confidence that we'll talk about:

- * Self-Confidence (comfort with who you are inside)
- * Social Confidence (comfort with the people around you)

Let's take a look at both of these, what they are, and see how they're connected.

Being ME

CONFIDENCE/SELF-ESTEEM
AGES 8-13

Do you like being you? Do you have confidence in yourself? Do you believe that there are kids who can like you for who you are and want to hang out with you?

If you answered NO to any of these questions, how about turning those NOs into know-how? *Being Me* is loaded with tips and advice for taking on everyday challenges and for building up your confidence and self-esteem. Come on! Take a peek inside and find lots of ways to explore your strengths and feel more confident in school, with your friends—with everything!

"Teenagers, children, and even parents, can learn important strategies from this information-packed, kid-friendly book!"—**Donald A. Moses, MD, Psychiatrist**

"Youngsters who read *Being Me* will be empowered because they are learning ways to take responsibility for their emotions in an age-appropriate manner."—**Rosemary Flanagan, PhD, ABPP, Touro College**

"Dr. Moss has created an engaging, matter-of-fact road map on how kids can deal with the social travails encountered in growing up. This book will serve as a valuable resource for teachers that can be used over and over again to coach children on how to proactively develop their confidence levels and social skills!"—**Judith A. Wilansky, EdD, Superintendent of Schools, Cold Spring Harbor Central School District**

WENDY L. MOSS, PH.D. is a practicing clinical psychologist who has worked with children in hospital, residential, private practice, clinic, and school settings. Dr. Moss likes to help kids see the sunny side and teaches them ways to boost their self-esteem and think positively about themselves. She believes that from time to time, even moms, dads, and other grown-ups need a little boost in confidence, too!

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