

OPTIMISM

Helping a child to look on the bright side is a significant life skill to develop

Optimists look at the flip side of negative events for some good, some hope and some reason to be positive. It means having a strong self-belief and confidence to deal with challenging situations.

Optimists do better academically, socially and enjoy better health than pessimists. Helping a child to look on the bright side is a significant life skill to develop. When children think that can succeed they are more likely to give things a try. In other words, if they think **THEY CAN, THEY WILL.**

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According to the General Parenting tip sheet on this topic published by the Queensland Government there are five building blocks of optimism:

1. Having a go
2. Practicing
3. Coming to terms with success and failure
4. Planning for the future
5. Having the belief and confidence to try again

Importantly, these building blocks link optimism with competence so when children experience success they are more likely to believe that they can achieve and have more success.

Some children are natural optimists. They are born with optimistic temperaments and have natural dispositions to deal with challenges and problems. Others expect the worst and tend to see catastrophes where really small challenges exist.

Recent American research indicates that children learn their optimism from their experiences of success and through their interactions with parents, teachers and significant others in the first eight years of life.

So the way adults talk is significant in the way they shape a child's belief about success or failure. The message is clear that adults need to be aware how they present the world to children as our explanatory style (the way we explain events) is on show.

OPTIMISTS EXPLAIN ADVERSE EVENTS IN THE FOLLOWING WAYS:

1. Adverse events tend to be temporary rather than permanent:

"It takes time to find a friend" rather than "No one likes me."

2. Situations or causes are specific rather than general:

"I am not so good at soccer" rather than "I am hopeless at sport."

3. Blame is rationalised rather than personalised:

"I was grounded because I hurt my sister" rather than "I was grounded because I am a bad kid."

Pessimists have a tendency to build mountains out of molehills and give up before trying. The trouble with pessimism is that it tends to be self-fulfilling prophecy. "I told you I wouldn't get a kick in the game. What was the point of me even turning up?" is a typical pessimist's approach. Such comments just reinforce pessimism and these feelings of

hopelessness lead to helplessness.

TO PROMOTE OPTIMISM IN THE CHILDREN AROUND YOU TRY THE FOLLOWING FOUR STRATEGIES:

1. Model positive thinking and optimism. Let children hear your positive self-talk.

2. Challenge children's negative or unrealistic appraisals. For instance, "Everyone hates me. I have no friends" can be challenged with "Sometimes it feels like we have no friends but you spent all morning with Melanie yesterday."

3. Teach children to **positively track.** They can look for the good things that happen in life, no matter how small and say them to themselves or out loud.

4. Teach children to **positively reframe.** When something unpleasant happens or failure occurs they can actively look on the bright side. E.g. "I pranged my bike but at least I came out unhurt" or "That activity didn't work but I know what to do next time."

The beauty about developing optimism is that it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, which makes it such a powerful success strategy.



Parenting *ideas*
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