

HOW TO IMPROVE CONFIDENCE AND SELF ESTEEM IN A CHILD WITH APD

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Children with APD and other invisible disabilities often suffer from a lack of self-esteem and self-confidence. With these tips you can help them to regain them. These tips are intended for parents, but they can also be used by other family members and teachers. They have been gathered over many years from many sources.

Praise your child – whenever you can, no matter how small the task. It will mean the world to them. Let them know that they can succeed, that academic success isn't everything and that everyone is good at something.

Know your child's weaknesses – their APD-related and other co-existing difficulties, what they struggle with, how they struggle. If you can do this, you can help them to understand who they are and how they 'work'. Tell them it isn't their fault that they struggle and you know that they try really hard every day, even if they might fail.

Know your child's strengths – find their learning style, their compensatory gifts and skills. Use these academic strengths to compensate for areas of weakness. Help them find out what accommodations they need and when they are in place, they can be free to build on their academic strengths and learn in the way they need to.

Encourage their hobbies and interests - what they like to do in their spare time, their favourite things. Encourage them to do these activities; they can help to compensate for all the bad things they experience. But don't force them into activities if they have no interest. What they most is to rest and relax and 'reboot' their sensory overloaded brain after a hard day at school and at weekends. They don't always need to be busy. Build a store of good memories to refer to when things get and let them see that things will be good again. Don't ever let them lose hope – and never lose hope yourself. That special 'something' is that they are good at can be used and developed - encourage them to pursue that in order to build a future career from it, if possible. It might be a gift, a skill or a strength – like arts/crafts, heightened visual skills, creative writing, being well organised, having empathy and compassion etc. Some employers will choose skills and aptitude over qualifications. Share their happiness in their chosen hobbies and let them know that what's important to them is important to you. Even if it may seem silly, it means a lot to them – try to understand that and make them feel good about their choices and show them that you value those choices and their right to make them, even if you don't agree with them. All children need to feel valued. Helping them to learn to use their strengths to overcome their weaknesses and building coping strategies will help them gain confidence and control over their lives, something children with APD and other invisible disabilities need, and will often lack.

Take small steps – don't expect miracles to happen overnight- these are traumatised children who need continued lifelong support. Work with them to help their confidence and self-esteem to grow little by little, day by day. Work on coping strategies and self-advocacy and their self-esteem and self-confidence will grow with the increasing control they gain over their lives

Understand their outbursts – if they get frustrated, angry, act up, or become moody – these reactions are normal in a child who is struggling, often unsupported or inadequately accommodated at school. Don't treat them as you would a normal 'behaviour' issue. These are cries for help. If you were in a constant position of failure, told you were lazy or stupid (or have that implied, or feel it without being told), struggle every day to make sense of the world around you and even what you think you hear turns out to be wrong - imagine how you would feel. They may act up at home and be a model child at school because home is (or should be) a safe place, free from dire consequences. Let them vent, give them space to rest and relax when they come home, give them a snack and a drink to refuel and let them recover from the exhaustion of processing all day. When they calm down, talk about what is bothering them, calmly. You will find that the anger will eventually not be as evident or as lasting. When they learn to control these outbursts, or come home one day without doing it, praise them.

Consider counselling for them - If their outbursts of frustration continue despite the measures above, or if they get worse or become withdrawn, exhibit signs of increased stress, anxiety or depression, seek counselling for them. It may be that they will need some extra help and coping strategies in order to manage these conditions. There is no medication that can help with APD; also anxiety/depression medications can slow down processing even more in some people, so please avoid them unless all other methods fail. Be positive – always put a positive

slant on everything if you can. Find the good in every situation, every day, and teach your child to do the same. Ask them to think of one good thing that happened each day and give them examples from your day - even if it is just a nice lunch or the sun was shining or you saw a bird. Let them see that life isn't all bad, and at the end of every day there is hope that tomorrow will be better.

Find support for yourself – talk to other parents, find online groups and get support from people who have been through the same issues with their children. Counselling might also help you; raising a child with APD is a long, hard road. There is never any shame in admitting that you - or they - need help. It is better than struggling alone. You can't help your child if you can't help yourself, if you're work out or stressed all the time. Be kind to yourself too - remember that your child having APD isn't your fault. You are their best advocate, their strength, their voice.

Use your own experiences – what difficulties have you experienced and how did you get around them? Use those lessons to help your child. Even if you don't have APD, there must have been times when you found things difficult. Explain that you struggle at times too, that you know how they feel and that it's OK to get things wrong at times. Everyone gets things wrong and people weren't born with the ability to know or do everything. When we make mistakes we can learn from them.

Teach self-advocacy – a child that knows about themselves, their difficulties and strengths, is a child ready to explain them to others and ask for the accommodations they need. Help them to become independent and self-sufficient adults. Help them to be comfortable with who they are and show that to others. You won't always be there to fight for them and they need to learn the skills to do this alone

Remember that they are just children – love them, play with them, don't waste time on useless therapies at the end of a long day. Let them be children.

The best thing you can give a child with APD is your acceptance of who they are.

- If you see them as faulty, they will too.
- If they don't improve after therapies that were never going to make them any better, they think they have failed - again.
- If you don't tell people that they have APD, or say it is something else (e.g. hearing loss) or try to hide it from people, they think they have something to be ashamed of, something awful that has to be hidden.
- If you don't tell them about their APD they will think they ARE lazy and stupid, that it IS their fault they are always failing – when it isn't their fault at all; they just have a medical condition like any other, a valid disability. But that is not what defines them and it is not all of who they are.

To be confident in themselves, children with APD need to know who they are - good and bad- and accept themselves. To have good self-esteem they must accept and value themselves and feel valued by others for who they are. How can they do that if their own family don't accept them? Don't compare them to another child or anyone else and expect them to be the same. Don't let your expectations for them be their expectations. They are just children, with strengths and weaknesses like the rest of us. Help them to see who they are and become the best they can be. That's the best that any of us can hope for.

APD SUPPORT

For UK support please visit my Facebook group - 'APD Support UK'
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1505407259721683/>

I have an international 'Adults with APD' Facebook group
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/APDadults/>

I also have a Facebook group for 'UK Teens / Young Adults with Auditory Processing Disorder'
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/309381575878508/>