



# HER VIEW FROM HOME

Journal v Kids v Grief v Health v Style v Kitchen v Contact v Q

Kids · Motherhood

## The One Question Your Kids Need You to Ask

2 Comments · by Whitney Herrmann





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Self-esteem: we know it is foundational to children's well-being and yet it is elusive at best to understand how to nurture it within the kids we love. It has inherent value and is prioritized and fretted over by all adults invested in growing our kids into mentally healthy people. Parents can identify when it is missing and yet what to do from there often leaves us at a loss. We spend enormous amounts of money making sure our children learn new athletic skills, praise even the most awkward art projects and cheer like mad when they show us their latest trick of hopping on one foot. Building up a child's confidence may be more simple than we think, yet far harder than we imagined.

When I started my therapy practice, I was confused by the lack of training any therapist or parent can access on how to impart this holy grail of parenting. We know it is important, but other than giving praises, parents are left wondering what else they can do to build the foundation of self-esteem.

Multiple studies through the last decade have reiterated the importance of grit and resiliency in our children; however, this conclusion comes with the assumption that person will have the self-esteem to pick themselves back up after falling and it is worth trying again in the hopes of gaining a different outcome. It seems self-esteem is an essential part of a person being able to manage criticism, challenge and conflict. It is essential in marriage in order for each person to not become codependent, looking for the partner's praise to accommodate a lack of belief in self. It is important in the later years, when looks fade, bodies ache and both women and men have to find something else within themselves in which to believe.

If a parent asks me what he or she can do to increase their child's confidence, we explore the basics of parenting, communication and the core of building the child's psychology. I always ask the parents one question that predicts more than anything else if the child will have a high self-esteem or not. When the child has a problem, does the parent fix it for her or does the parent ask the child what she thinks she should do? There is no more powerful statement a parent can make to increase self-esteem than, **"What do you think you should do about that?"**

By asking a child what he thinks, a parent immediately encourages the child to keep processing with the parent's endorsement and guidance. It is like saying to

the child, "I know we are in murky waters, but I am right here, holding your hand...keep walking." When parents ask their child to come up with his or her own solutions, they can not only help to influence the outcome, but they also gain access into the child's perspective, usually discovering much more about their son or daughter than they ever would have if they would have offered the answer right away.

Why is it so hard for parents to wait on children to find their own solutions? It is because it strikes to the core of our humanity and exposes our fears, insecurities and pain. When my daughter tells me Vivian does not want to sit by her at school, I want to tell her to make new friends and then call the teacher to make sure she is only having my daughter sit next to people who will know what an amazing kid she is! However, when I jump in, I am subconsciously telling my daughter I do not believe she can manage this first taste of social pain. I can feel my own pain bubbling up, threatening to hinder my child's growth process. If I can take a breath, ask God to fill in the gaps and guide the process, then ask my daughter how that made her feel, what she did and what she thinks she should do about that, I am building the foundation of self-esteem in her that will be essential for years to come. Solutions are the best anxiety relievers in the world. When a problem presents itself and we are uncomfortable, giving our children the answer immediately puts us back in the driver's seat. To wait on our children's pace in such a quickly moving world requires peace with the process, a larger goal set in place and becoming comfortable with being uncomfortable. And I hate being uncomfortable.

You are your child's first great endorsement. Do you want your children to believe you have the answers or do you want them to have a deep-seated belief that the answers lie within and you are simply there to help? It is difficult, but the next time your child has a problem, pause for a moment and ask yourself if you are here to stop pain or to teach the child to navigate it. Asking her what she thinks she should do will invite a lifetime of conversations that will be essential to building the self-esteem that child needs. Pause for a moment and pace alongside your child; the view just might surprise you.



## Whitney Herrmann

Whitney Herrmann is a licensed therapist serving women, families and marriages throughout the greater Denver area. She regularly accepts speaking engagements offering powerful insights, tangible steps for change, with a bit of fun and humor along the way. She is married to a wonderful man, Ryan and has two beautiful daughters, Eden and Shiloh. Please see her biography on Grace Counseling's website for more of her work or to schedule an appointment.

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### **THE PUZZLE MAPS**

A Montessori classroom offers many opportunities for young children to expand their knowledge during the times when they are motivated by spontaneous interest. The large wooden puzzle maps are among the most popular activities in the classroom. The child can move each puzzle piece by grasping a little knob on its flat, shiny surface. The introductory map of the world has a separate puzzle piece for each continent. After working with the world map, the child can do one of six puzzle maps of continents in which each country is represented by a separate puzzle piece. Finally, there is a map of the United States with a separate piece for each state.

At first the children use the maps simply as puzzles. Gradually they learn the names of many of the countries as well as information about climate and products. The maps illustrate many geographical facts concretely. The children can see the great size of Russia and the positions of Great Britain, Japan and Iceland as islands.