



Building self-esteem away from the screens

By Martine Oglethorpe

As so much of a young person's social world revolves around their online feeds and connections, it is no wonder that 'likes' and comments have become a social currency and a reflection of where young people see themselves amongst their peers.

Whilst social media has the ability to ignite a flourishing self-esteem with glowing comments, hundreds of likes and thousands of followers, it can also have a negative impact. A lack of likes, followers or comments, or even just a small number of nasty or negative comments, can do irreparable damage to a struggling self-esteem.

In addition, because many of the social networks kids are using centre around the sharing of visuals, this can lead to an over representation of aesthetics as the yardstick of popularity. Instagram, Snapchat and musical.ly are some of the popular networks right now and all are based on photos, video and performance. Which is all well and good if you have a good sense of who you are and are not relying on the feedback from these networks to decide your worth. But for many, putting themselves out there can mean they open themselves up to judgement and even ridicule.

And even if they get hundreds of likes or lots of lovely comments, it is often the one nasty one they remember the most.

We need kids to know they are worth more than their likes and followers. We need them to know their sense of self is not based on what others, and even strangers, may think of them.

But how do we do that in a world that sees kids so attached to their screens and their online social connections?

Well, like all things in parenting today, there is no one simple solution. However there are certainly ways we can help ensure that a sense of self-worth is based on the achievements, the values and the qualities that make each and every child unique.

Build their independence and resilience early

From a very early age, provide them with opportunities to build their independence, have responsibilities, learn to fail, make mistakes and problem solve when things don't go to plan. These skills will become invaluable in a world that sees constant comparison and the inevitable negative interactions of the online world.



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Stay relevant

Don't resort to the "in my day we...". We may well reminisce about the more carefree days where we got to switch off and hangout with mates in the neighbourhood oblivious to what the rest of the world thought of our latest picture. But that's not particularly relevant to our kids today. And shutting down their account, turning off their computer and walking away from social media altogether is really not an option for most. Be sure your kids know that you understand the role the technology plays and the challenges they face. That way you put yourself in the best position to have the right conversations and put in place the right boundaries.

Provide other role models and community

Getting involved in outside pursuits and interests away from the screens can help them form connections with other parts of the community. Coaches, youth leaders and other role models can all play a part in mentoring a child about the importance of balance whilst reminding them that there is a life beyond the screens.

Give them opportunities to help

There is no better way to feel better about oneself than to feel useful.

Helping at home, helping in the community and volunteering can be great ways for kids to build self-worth away from the screens. It may be helping coach some kids at the local sports club or getting involved in a cause or issue that matters to them. This will give them a sense of purpose that revolves around their actions and their input and not just what others perceive about them.

Family rituals

Regular meals and time where no devices are present can be crucial to providing the stability and security young people need. Mealtimes have been proven to be an effective way of letting kids know they always have a place that is familiar, secure and unconditional. This may not be a reality for every family every night, but trying to incorporate any sense of ritual into a family, especially one where screens are not involved, will certainly provide a positive impact.

We know that the technology and the devices are going to continue to play a huge role in the social and emotional lives of our children. Therefore we need to ensure that we are doing all we can to give them a balanced, true and positive view of themselves that continues to flourish both in real life and online.



Martine Oglethorpe is a speaker, counsellor and educator with a passion for building resilient kids in a digital world. Devices and the online world will continue to play an increasing role in the lives of our families for much of their information, education, entertainment and socialisation. It is imperative therefore, we have the skills, understanding and strategies to help them navigate the challenges and make the most of the opportunities that the technology has to offer. Martine is available for student workshops focused on positive online behaviours, for teacher professional development on how the digital world affects what happens in the classroom and for corporate and parent information sessions. If you would like to book Martine for a presentation or to get more ideas on dealing with the digital world then head to her website themodernparent.net. Contact details: info@martineoglethorpe.com.au themodernparent.net [facebook.com/themodernparent](https://www.facebook.com/themodernparent)

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