



Parenting self-esteem – the parent’s job, not the child’s

Parenting a child who isn’t responding in the way we expect can be hard work. Most parents give love and receive love, give eye contact and receive it, give hugs and get them. It is a reciprocal relationship which builds on itself because they feel the warmth that comes from being loved. However, because many children coming into families at an older age have experienced losses and traumas, they are often unable to respond to you in a way which makes you as their parent feel good. This may take weeks, months or even years to change. We can’t rely on our children to be able to support or nurture our ‘parenting self esteem’. And being the parents, the adults, we shouldn’t expect them to! However, we are all human and not receiving positive feedback in the way of smiles or hugs or ‘I love you’s’ makes it harder to keep being loving in our feelings, words and actions. In addition, if we are receiving behavior which pushes us away and makes us feel unloved, humiliated or disrespected by our children, it can be REALLY hard and can get the most positive and confident parent down. We need to find other avenues of getting positive feedback and support.

A parenting tool: for when parenting and nurturing is hard work

The charts on the following pages are simple tools – and you can change them in any way to suit your particular family. They are designed to help you monitor your parenting and how you manage as a parent, rather than on the feedback you are receiving from your child. This is a YOU chart, and all about how you are feeling as a parent. This is not to say that we shouldn’t reflect on our child’s behaviour and responses, but this exercise is just about you.

What to do

- Buy yourself some stickers – ones which make you smile
- Each day, sit down and reflect on how YOU did (not how your child behaved)
- Even if you felt you didn’t do well, stick a sticker on your calendar (or your mirror) reflecting how you did as a parent that day

The following charts are on the areas of actions, attitudes, feelings and taking care of your self.

Filling the charts out will only take a minute and remember to use it as YOUR tool. If something doesn’t feel right for you or doesn’t suit your child, CHANGE it so it best suits you.



Chart 1)

Taking care of yourself

It is easy to forget your own needs when you have a child who has challenging and exhausting behaviours. However, it is then that you most need to take care of yourself and your relationships with your family and friends. This is about building your strength and resilience.

Refer to chart one and mark your progress at taking care of your own needs.

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Organise time for a walk alone each day.				
Arrange to catch up with friends for a coffee.				
Organise a night where you and your partner can spend some time alone.				
Pamper yourself, do something that makes you feel relaxed (visit the library, have a pedicure, take a massage, play golf).				

Chart 2)

FEELINGS: Having warm feelings for your child

Sometimes you need to act love before you feel love. We can feel positive towards our child, but be so emotionally exhausted that we don't feel warmth. Once you can separate your parenting self esteem from your child's responses to you, you may find that the warmth you feel for your child increases.

Refer to chart two and score yourself on how warm you feel towards your child on each day.

Once again, this is a tool to reflect and help you, not to beat yourself up with if you are having a hard time. Every parent has times when they don't feel warm and loving, however, if you are constantly scoring very low, think about seeking support through family, friends or the Post Adoption Support Services.

	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F
10/10 warm and loving																										
9/10																										
8/10																										
7/10																										
6/10																										
5/10																										
4/10																										
3/10																										
2/10																										
1/10 cold/shut off																										



Chart 3)

ACTIONS: saying (affirming) and doing

Your child may be aloof and resist closeness, or you may already hug your child and tell them you love them regularly. Build on what you have, starting from where is right for you and your child. If some of the ideas are too young for your child, change them to things which are more suited to your child's emotional or developmental age (not their actual age).

Refer to chart three and reflect on your progress, step by step, towards actions affirming your parenting.

	Say	Touch	Do
Week 1	Say 'I love you' to your child at least once a day this week. Tell someone something good about your child every day.	Touch your child on the shoulder or give them a brief squeeze twice a day this week. Put 15 minutes aside each evening and get your child to sit next to you and read to / with them.	Do something as a family. This might be to go for a walk, or go for a bus or train ride, go to feed the ducks.
Week 2	Say 'I love you' to your child at least twice a day this week. Tell one person something positive about your child every day, AND tell one person every day that you love your child.	This week increase touch to hugs every day. Continue to read to / with them. Play 'this little pig went to market' or 'round and around the garden went the teddy bear' or 'row row row your boat' – rhyming tactile games using lots of smiley eye contact.	Do something as a family as in week 1. Once through the week, cook or do another activity with your child. Expect mess and for it to take time. Remember to laugh and smile, and that it is ok to get messy with food.
Week 3	Continue as above. Tell your child something you like about them every day. This can be a behaviour, the way they played sport, or the way they have dressed or done their hair.	This week increase it to two proper hugs each day...and perhaps a few quick squeezes in between. Continue to read to / with them. Help with doing his/her hair at least twice this week, even if they are older and generally independent with this. Let them return the favor - give them permission to make you look as beautiful or as silly as they like. Have the camera ready but hide the scissors!	Do something as a family as in week 1. If the cooking last week was a success, try it again and perhaps make it into a weekly date with your child. Remember the idea is fun and that cooking can be creative. Make sure you do this when you are not rushed or stressed. The idea is to have fun.
Week 4	Continue as above for week 1 & 2. Continue to tell someone something positive about your child every day, AND make sure your child can hear you saying these things. Tell your child every day about something you like about them.	This week - depending on your child this might need to be further down the track - make up a 'huggometre' chart which has a spot to tick for five hugs each day. ⁽¹⁾ On day one, see how quickly you can get through the hugs and the next day see how long you can make them last throughout the day. Ask your partner to guess at dinnertime if it was a slow hug day or a race hug day. Use comradeship between the hugger and the child to make it hard for the guesser. Continue to read to / with them.	Do something as a family as in week 1. Play hairdressers and get some wash out hair dye (for parties) and some face paint. Get the whole family involved and let your child return the favor. Take photos!

1) 'Creating Healthy Futures' (DVD 4 set) presented by Daniel Hughes



Chart 4)

YOUR ATTITUDE: Being Bigger, Stronger, Kinder and Wiserthrough having an attitude of PLAYFULNESS, LOVE, ACCEPTANCE, CURIOSITY and EMPATHY

Parents need to be Bigger, Stronger, Wiser and Kinder than their children. Daniel Hughes talks about 'The Attitude' of Playfulness, Love, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy⁽¹⁾ as being a constructive attitude for parents to hold.

This is harder than it sounds if your child breaks something you value, kicks the dog (or you), urinates on the floor on purpose, or treats you like you are the worst parent on earth.

However, you are working on monitoring how YOU as parents are doing, NOT the child.

Refer to Chart four and step by step, reflect your progress in maintaining your parenting attitude. Give yourself a daily score as to how you think you went on the attitude monitor. Remember, even if your child had the worst day in HIS or HER attitude, that doesn't count. Only YOUR response / attitude (not how you felt) counts.

Don't beat yourself up if it is a 1/10. We all have those days or times like that in a day. You are just using this as a tool to increase your attitude scores week by week. You don't need to be perfect – you are a parent, not an angel! However, if you are constantly scoring very low, please think about seeking support through family, friends or Post Adoption Support Services.

Playfulness, Love, Acceptance Curiosity & Empathy	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F
10/10																										
9/10																										
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6/10																										
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1/10																										

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