

# Raising *confident* children

by Anne Statham



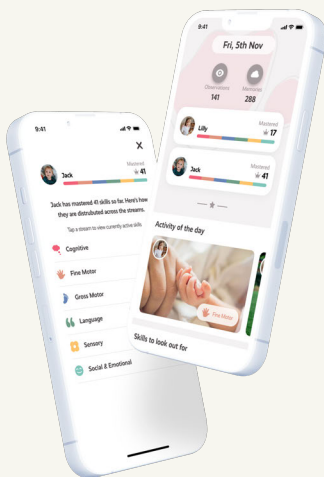
*My First  
Five Years*

Children's self-awareness impacts so many areas of their development. Along with their self-image and their understanding of their value and abilities, self-awareness affects their self-confidence, their potential to experience joy, to be curious, to wonder, to face problems and to bounce back, in addition to their ability to be open to new thinking and learning.

For babies and young children to flourish, we need to pay attention to how they understand themselves and feel about themselves, and how secure they feel in close relationships.

The path to self-confidence begins at birth and continues through childhood and adolescence, right through to adulthood. Below, we will take a look at the journey.

At My First Five Years, we recognise that the journey of social and emotional development intertwines with all other areas of development. Our app offers a safe and supportive learning space which guides you through your child's important developmental milestones. Download our app below to find out more about how to support your child's self-confidence.



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## Developing self-confidence and self-awareness in newborn babies

Understanding who we are and how we relate to other people begins with bodily self-awareness. Your newborn baby will take the first step in this journey as they learn that they are separate to other people and objects.



Your baby develops awareness of their body through their senses as they begin to understand where their body begins and ends as they move their arms and legs. As your baby's hands come into view, they will associate this with the feeling of moving them, and as they kick against your hand, they will gain sensory feedback.

Gradually, this self-awareness will evolve to encompass an understanding that, in addition to being separate to other people, those others have different views and feelings. Your baby will begin to develop their understanding of themselves through their interactions with other people, by being held and comforted, and through the responsive interactions they engage in with those around them.[2]

### Practical tips:

- Simple massage moments – touch is part of many daily care routines. Spending time emphasising sensitive touch through massage supports your baby to develop bodily self-awareness.



- Time with hands and feet uncovered – giving your baby time with their hands and feet uncovered allows them to move them and explore them with their mouth, prompting a deeper sensory understanding of their body.

- Responsive interactions – being responsive to your baby's displays of emotions and feelings through your back-and-forth interactions shows them that these emotions are valid and important.



### Developing self-confidence and self-awareness in older babies

Your baby may begin to react to their reflection when looking at a mirror. While your baby might not fully understand that their reflection shows them how they look to others, they are already on the journey to self-recognition.



Your baby will begin to show more of a sense of self as they start to use pointing gestures and eye contact to declare interest and excitement during play. Tuning in to the things they are interested in and giving shared attention shows your child that their opinions matter.



## Practical tips:

- Mirror play – engage in joint mirror play, making gestures and expressions together.



Your baby is beginning to understand that their thoughts and feelings are different from other people's thoughts and feelings, and that people have thoughts and feelings about them. The way in which your baby understands themselves as they grow is closely linked to the way in which you, and other people they spend lots of time with, respond to them. Their sense of themselves develops, at least in part, from how other people see them.[1]

At this point your baby might begin to refuse to do things. This demonstrates they are taking another step towards developing a sense of themselves as a separate person. They are realising that they can make some decisions and do things for themselves, and part of what they need to do to develop this sense of autonomy is sometimes to refuse to do things.

- Respond to your baby's preferences – your baby may demonstrate very clear preferences for when they want to be held, whether they like to be tickled or which toy they'd rather play with. Tune in to what they're telling you and put their thoughts and actions into words, for example, you might say, "Oh the light is too bright for you, you are turning away".

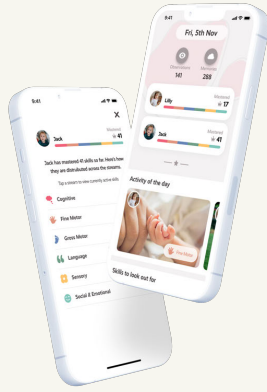


# Our definition of a *confident* child

A child who has a strong sense of self-belief and is resilient. They recognise that they have valid and valuable contributions and because of this have developed self-assurance and self-reliance.

Confident children understand and have realistic expectations of their abilities, qualities, and ideas, as well as their feelings and emotions. Confidence is a journey that continues throughout a child's lifetime, but there are lots of things you can do within the first five years to build strong foundations so that confidence flourishes.

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## **Developing self-confidence and self-awareness in toddlers**

As deeper self-awareness develops, your toddler might begin to use their name or point to themselves, showing they are beginning to think about themselves and the way they appear to others. In addition, demonstrations of preferences may have more force and be varied, such as what to wear or eat, where to go, or what to do.



Your toddler will gradually be able to think about themselves and reflect on what they like and can do. However, this self-reflection involves developing their understanding of themselves and developing their cognitive skills and will take some time.



You may notice your child has a greater awareness of how they appear to other people as they will explore different situations and experiences, and begin to reflect on themselves and on the behaviour of others, thinking about how others respond to them and view their actions.

This reflection leads your child to begin to evaluate their own behaviour. Through reflective self-awareness they begin to form their self-image and a personal understanding of different expectations of behaviour, and of their abilities. You may notice your child begin to adjust their behaviour to different social situations.



Beginning to be aware that other people have an opinion about them and wanting this to be positive helps your child to think about who they are and their actions.

Self-awareness is part of the journey towards self-regulation, understanding how you appear to others, and developing self-confidence and self-image.[2]



Running alongside this desire to ‘fit-in’ with others, self-confidence allows your child to ‘hold on to themselves’ in different situations and to have confidence in their own opinions and views, even when encountering differing options or ideas. Self-confidence might involve voicing a different opinion to others, negotiating with others, or advocating that their feelings are valid and should be accepted.

## Practical tips for supporting toddlers

- Mind-minded talk – this is talking to your child about what might be going on in their mind, by reading their communication cues and tuning in to their emotions, desires and interests and then putting these into words, for example “Oh I see you want that...”, or “You are feeling frightened by the dog.”

- Being the expert – your child will have developed their own set of interests, and encouraging their confidence to express these to adults and their peers allows your child to become the ‘expert’ around a subject and perhaps know more about it than you! This helps support their growing sense of unique identity and self.

## Developing self-confidence and self-awareness in children

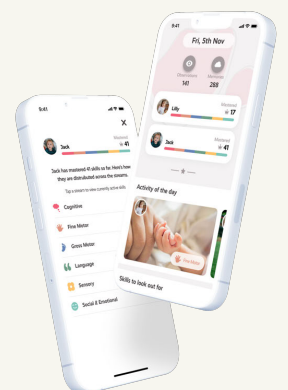
Your child will begin to explore their understanding of themselves in relation to other people. They may take on different roles in their pretend play to understand more about expectations of behaviour in different situations and how relationships with others work.

Your child’s reflective sense of self is developing further through noticing and thinking about how other people view them. They learn about this by the way in which the people around them respond to them and what people say to them and about them.

As social understanding develops, you may notice your child becoming self-conscious, and feelings known as ‘self-conscious evaluative’ emotions develop. As children become more aware of rules or accepted ways of behaving in the groups around them, they may evaluate themselves in relation to others. These emotions require cognitive skills to think about their actions in relation to what might be expected.[3]

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Examples of self-conscious evaluative emotions include pride, embarrassment and guilt. Embarrassment might result from a situation in which your child feels others might think they have done something wrong or have failed in some way. This type of embarrassment is linked to shame but is a less intense emotion. When embarrassed in this way, your child might smile or turn away. However, when they feel shame, they will show a greater level of distress or try to hide.[3]

It is suggested that as children develop, some feelings of guilt can help them to adapt their behaviour to what is expected in a particular situation, whereas feelings of shame can result in a view of themselves as being 'bad'. In older children and adolescents, feelings of shame can lead to a tendency to avoid interactions out of fear of doing the wrong thing.[2] Furthermore, feelings of shame, or of guilt that are not used to repair a situation, are thought to be linked with anxiety.[4]



It is important to think about how the messages you give your child when you respond to the things that they do might influence how they evaluate themselves. This could be how you encourage them to keep trying by commenting on their hard work or persistence, rather than commenting on an outcome, or how you ensure they understand that although they did something wrong, they are not a bad person, they are learning.

## Practical tips for supporting children

- Positive self-talk – ensure you speak to your child or about them or to other people in a positive way. They will notice comments about their characteristics, and these might begin to form part of their self-concept.

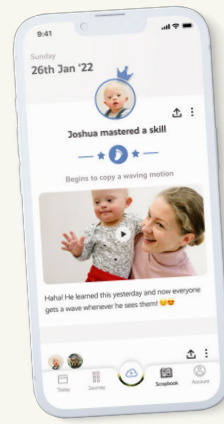


- Ask for your child's opinion – include your child's voice in discussion and decision-making. If you ask, "What do you think?", you are letting them know that their viewpoint is important.





- Be authentic – sometimes it might be tempting to hide behind the role of ‘Dad’ or ‘Mum’, or ‘expert’. It is important to let your child see you are a real person with needs of your own by highlighting the things you enjoy doing, and things you dislike. When you are unsure what to do, need to think through options, weigh up possibilities or even get a little flustered, use your own mind-minded talk aloud. You may worry this will make your child feel unsafe, but you are modelling how you prioritise your own emotions, desires and interests.



**The My First Five Years app is packed with ideas to support your child’s unique development journey, together with activities and a scrapbook to record those treasured moments. Download our app now!**



## A lifelong journey

Nurturing self-awareness and self-confidence supports children to develop healthy relationships, express their emotions and become resilient, self-confident learners.



Your child will continue to develop their sense of self throughout their life and these firm foundations will help them to flourish.

## References

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