

# Coping when parenting threatens your self-esteem

When you are rearing children, many guidance tools you try will fail or backfire; however, this does not make you unlovable or incapable as a parent.

There are days that exhaust your ingenuity and patience. You know, like the one where you've spent hours with your 3-year-old, bathing her, convincing her to wear long pants instead of her bathing suit (it's January!), feeding her, helping her put together puzzles, facilitating a play date — generally doing your best to provide a good life for her. And what do you hear back? Maybe it's "No!" or "Go away!" or even "I hate you!"

Moments like this challenge a person's self-esteem, says Elizabeth Crary, parent educator and author of "Dealing with Disappointment: Helping Kids Cope When Things Don't Go Their Way." Parents may get angry or upset when their self-esteem is threatened — that is, when they don't feel lovable, capable or (as in the situation above) appreciated or even respected.

Feeling incapable or helpless can also provoke strong emotions in parents. This commonly happens when a child misbehaves repeatedly and nothing the parent tries works to change it. The threat

to your self-esteem is the same whether you are dealing with a defiant preschooler who won't stay in bed or a recalcitrant teen who won't go to school.

Some of us cry. Many of us get angry. Crary says what's really needed is perspective.

When you get angry — or very hurt by something your child does or says — check to see if you are feeling unloved or incapable. Remember, it is the nature of normal parenting to have efforts fail. This does not mean you are unlovable or ineffective.

Crary recommends several tools for taking care of yourself when your self-esteem is challenged while parenting. A few ideas drawn from her book are outlined below.

- Talk to someone. Sitting down with a friend, a sympathetic relative, a pastor or a counselor can help you to clarify what the parenting problem is, acknowledge

your feelings, and look at your choices.

- Use positive self-talk. What you say to yourself really matters — true or not, you start to believe it. Start monitoring the voice inside you and change the negative statements to positive ones. Consider the following statement, "I'm a lousy parent. Alex still has tantrums all the time." Below are four different ways to rephrase the situation positively.



## Strategies

**Lovable affirmation:** "I am lovable even though I'm not perfect and Alex yells at me."

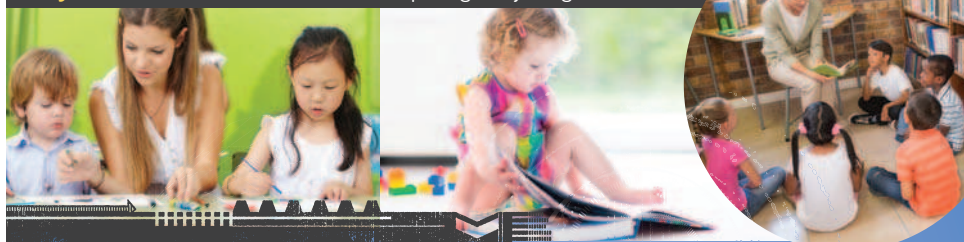
**Growing affirmation** "I am learning different ways to help Alex so he can do things himself."

**Capable affirmation:** "Alex has fewer tantrums each day than he had six months ago."

**Positive example:** "Alex went for an hour without getting upset once."

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