# **How to Help Your Child Overcome an Inferiority Complex**

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Wondering what is the best way to help a child develop greater self-esteem and confidence? It's guiding them on ways to overcome their issues on their own.

When kids frequently don’t feel confident about themselves or their abilities, it’s not unusual for them to face struggles with their peers, their teachers, and sometimes, even their families.

But when those feelings of inadequacy are coupled with angry behavior, anxiety, blue moods, and avoiding playtime, parties, and other social situations, it may signal an [inferiority complex](https://www.everydayhealth.com/emotional-health/understanding-inferiority-complex/), says [Leigh Johnson-Migalski, PsyD](https://www.adler.edu/programs/leigh-johnson-migalski/), an associate professor of psychology at [Adler University](https://www.adler.edu/) in Chicago.

Although the term is not recognized in the American Psychiatric Association’s current [Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)](https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/practice/dsm), inferiority complex can be thought of as a constellation of thoughts and behaviors that together impede a person’s ability to feel competent in almost all aspects of life.

**Specific signs that a child might be developing an inferiority complex include:**

* Generally avoiding eye contact
* Being overly critical of themselves and others
* Often referring to themselves as unlucky
* Frequently expressing embarrassment
* Repeatedly comparing themselves with others, including friends, siblings, and classmates
* Not trying new things because they expect they won’t be good at them

It’s important to note that these signs can occur with other psychological issues as well, such as depression and [social anxiety disorder](https://www.everydayhealth.com/social-anxiety-disorder/guide/). If you see changes in your child’s view of his or herself or the way he or she is relating to others, and it’s affecting his or her social and school life, a therapist (either in or outside of school) may be helpful. If confidence is your child’s primary issue, below are ways you can help.

## **How Can You Know if Your Kid Is Feeling Less-Than?**

Start by asking yourself, “Does my elementary school-aged child consistently cooperate with teachers, friends, or playmates?” advises Dr. Johnson-Migalski. “Are they struggling with friends in the community or family members?”

Children who experience themselves as being less-than often express the feeling they don’t fit in or belong, which can lead to problematic behavior, such as withdrawing or acting out. They may also periodically misbehave because they find that it gets them noticed in situations where they otherwise feel invisible, she notes. They mistakenly perceive that their “power struggles, attention-seeking, or hurtful behavior are the main ways for them to connect with others,” Johnson-Migalski explains.

## **How Can You Help a Child With an Inferiority Complex?**

One way to help a child with an inferiority complex is to give lots of encouragement, “just like giving water to a plant,” says Johnson-Migalski. She also advises:

**Letting Them Find Solutions to Problems**: “If the child is having difficulties with friends, instead of telling him or her what to do, ask 'How are you feeling about this situation? How have you tried to fix it? What happened when you tried that?'” This helps your child find a sense of belonging and connection with others and helps them believe in their own abilities, she explains.

It’s fine to brainstorm solutions together, Johnson-Migalski adds. But let the child ultimately decide which actions to take. This fosters critical thinking, which is, well, critical to developing a feeling of competency. “If we fix everything for our children, they won’t know how to function as adults,” she explains.

**Praising the Child’s Efforts:**

 The most important thing you can do is to avoid criticism. Instead, recognize and draw positive attention to any efforts the child is making.

**Encouraging Self-Sufficiency:**

Assigning chores and other age-appropriate tasks helps a child build a sense of mastery and prevents them from becoming too passive or dependent, which heighten feelings of insecurity.

“Let the child pack his own backpack and remember to return library books to the school library,” says Johnson-Migalski. “If you remember all the things a kid has to bring to school, it robs the child of the opportunity to make their own mistakes and to learn from them.”

If your child, say, forgets to return a library book and is upset because they’re not allowed to take out another book until they do, you can give a hug after school and tell them that this will help them better remember the book next time, Johnson-Migalski says. “It’s important to let children experience those hurts so they build [resilience](https://www.everydayhealth.com/wellness/resilience/).”

**Modeling Self-Compassion** :

When you make mistakes, such as misplacing your car keys or arriving late to an appointment, don’t berate yourself in front of your child. Use those moments as opportunities to show your child how to rebound. Admit the mistake wholeheartedly, accept the consequences, apologize if needed, and then let it go. If you can, point out that you’re glad to be able to learn from it so you can avoid making the same mistake in the future.

**Practicing Mindfulness Meditation Together:**

 An increasing body of research, including [a study of sixth-graders done at the Harvard University Center for Education Policy Research](https://www.transformingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/2019-BCRC-Mindfulness-Brief.pdf) and an analysis of more than 100 previous studies [published in Clinical Psychology Review](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3679190/), suggested that [mindfulness practice](https://www.everydayhealth.com/meditation/) — sitting quietly, usually with eyes closed, and paying calm attention to your breath and your thoughts without judgement — increases optimism, decreases reactivity to stress, reduces anxiety and aggressive behavior, enhances resilience, and confers a host of other benefits in both children and adults.