

Encouragement Building Self-Esteem in Your Children

By Melissa M. Williams

Self-Acceptance is strengthened throughout childhood when adults encourage their children to discover their personal gifts and talents. Often this requires parental involvement as boys and girls decide if they like math or science better than the other, enjoy sports more than the arts, music more than literature, or maybe they acquire a number of interests that emerge into a perfect package of skills. Allowing our children to have options and an understanding of their likes and dislikes strengthens their sense of self into adulthood. We should encourage our children to embrace their God-given gifts and accept differences in others too.

Many of the characters in *Iggy the Iguana* have different interests, which shape their personalities. Often, Iggy is shocked by his friends' abilities because he assumes these animals would have fallen into a different stereotype. Iggy is pleasantly surprised each time he discovers that he judged too quickly. These surprises often lead to Iggy becoming more comfortable with his own interests.

For Example:

Iggy thought that all turtles could swim, but Snap was a box shell turtle and told Iggy that he was restricted to, "Land Only Dude!"

Iggy figured Lizibeth the Lizard would want to be a cheerleader when the reptiles went out to play baseball because his little sister was a cheerleader. Boy was he surprised when Liz could hit a baseball harder and farther than the boys! And as you will discover in the sequel, Summer League, Liz could not only hit but also pitch better than the boys on the team too.

Lastly, Iggy assumed that Kit Kat Kay Kat (the class clown cat) wouldn't do very well on his spelling test because Kit Kat was always joking

around. Well, Kit Kat was the only one in the class who got a 100 A+ on his test.

These examples in the story are used to help children and even adults understand that things are not always as they seem in the beginning. We can take this lesson a little farther if perhaps we have judged a child for being a “problem child” in school or get frustrated that they do so well in one subject and struggle in the other. When we look deeper, we may just realize that the “problem child” is actually a genius and perhaps is not being challenged enough in the classroom. Someone labeled a “day dreamer” may become a writer, filmmaker, or an artist. Just as my friend and author, Bobby Ozuna, often says, “Some children are so creative that they see worlds outside the windows of the classroom.”

Don't let your own discouragement hinder your child's ability to keep trying. Encourage them with new ways of learning and continually praise them for what they do best. Building up their self-esteem will help carry them through the subjects they struggle with the most. And remember their natural interest in one subject over another could turn into their career one day. The child who dresses differently may become the next great clothing designer. The one who doodles on his notebook may become the next Picasso. The one who daydreams in class may become the next J.K. Rowling. And as for the class clown, he or she may be the next recipient of an Academy Award!

Lesson's From Iggy the Iguana:
(Inserts from the Iggy the Iguana Chapter Book)
Ages 7-11

Don't Judge Too Quickly:

“Okay, now we can really play!” Iggy cheered.
Snap picked up a ball, and Iggy picked up a bat.
“You can be our cheerleader,” Iggy told Liz.
“What makes you think I can't play just as good as you guys?” Liz challenged.
“Oh, well I just figured....”
“Well you figured wrong! Give me that bat, Iggy!”

she demanded.

Iggy graciously handed Liz the bat.

“Show me what you got, Snap!” Liz shouted.

“Why don’t I have Iggy throw? He’s a real pitcher!” Snap knew that Iggy had been a pitcher for his old little league team, and besides, Snap always played catcher. He also figured this would be a perfect way for Iggy to redeem himself in front of Liz, so Snap tossed the ball to his buddy. “Show her what you’re made of, man!”

Iggy caught the ball and looked across the yard at Liz, who had now turned from a bright shade of lime green to a sandy tan color, resembling the brown tree trunk behind her. He could barely make out the difference between her body and the tree. Iggy pitched it softly to her, but Liz just stood there with her hand on her hip.

“That was weak!” she mocked. “Don’t you have a curve ball or fast ball up your sleeve?”

“Alright ... I hope you can handle it!” Iggy picked up the ball and threw it with lightning speed, certain Liz wouldn’t see it coming. To his surprise, Liz hit it clear across the yard and over the neighbor’s fence!

“Wow!” the boys stared in amazement.

“Now that’s what I’m talking about!”

Iggy was definitely impressed by Liz’s batting skills. He even thought she could probably teach him a thing or two to help improve his own swing.

“You should join our summer league.” Snap told Liz.

“Already on one, boys,” she smiled.