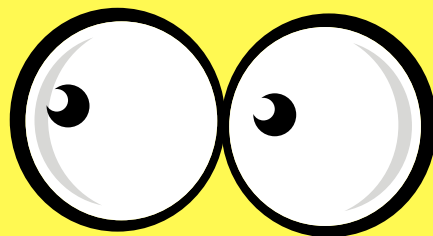


CONFIDENCE

CONFIDENCE



NO

PAPA

Breaking the Myths of Confidence

By Aarohi Open Learning Community

CONFIDENCE CONFIDENCE NO PAPA

By Aarohi Open Learning Community

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CONFIDENCE CONFIDENCE NO PAPA

*Self Published by Aarohi Life Education Trust,
Village Bodichipalli, Kelamangalam, Distt Krishnagiri, Tamil Nadu, 635113, India*

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First Edition: Year 2022

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WHY THIS BOOK ON CONFIDENCE?

Aarohi is a community of families doing open learning.

Life and education at Aarohi is a journey to

Understand oneself
and develop strengths,
skills, and talents that
one needs and wants.

Enjoy exploring this
wonderful world and
connect with it in a
meaningful way.

Create your journey,
live your own dreams,
and add value to
yourself every day.

Open learners question - specialty if something is seemingly quite popular and over used - such as Confidence.

When working with children, something was missing and we realized it was our understanding. In some ways we were simply using this term without a deeper dialogue into what it is and its relevance in our life.

Hence this book - a compilation of articles written primarily for parents and teachers - inviting you to read it with an open mind

HOW MUCH WILL YOU PAY FOR CONFIDENCE?

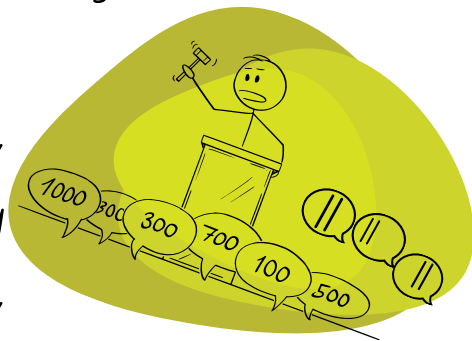
A boy was taking part in the auction of a cycle.

He started the bid with Rs 11/-

Very soon somebody bid higher but the boy still voiced out his bid as Rs 11/-

Another person bidded even higher but the boy continued and said Rs 11/-

The bid continued going higher and higher, but the boy continued to bid, after every bid by another person, in a louder voice, "Rs 11/-"



We do not know why the boy's bid was stuck at Rs 11/-. Maybe that was the amount he had in his pocket, or maybe that is what he thought the cycle was worth, or maybe it was his whimsical experiment to try and get the cycle at Rs 11/-.

Whatever was his thinking, what amazes us is his persistence. His choice to not be constricted by how the world operated, rather to operate how he saw the world. The sustenance of his idea and not the outcome.

No, he did not win the auction, obviously not. What he did win was his conviction.

This small booklet is hence priced at Rs. 11/-, as a mark of solidarity not with the concept of confidence, rather solidarity with all the children in this world who we know are capable and are yearning to live beyond the idea of confidence.

Inviting you to pay Rs 11/-. Let's fly out of the pigeon holes, to live outside the box, in the world of possibilities.

If you wish to donate any other amount to Aarohi Trust - you are most welcome. Send to UPI aarohilife@upi or use this QR code or see aarohilife.org/supportus



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**TO HELL WITH
CONFIDENCE**

The four most common words heard when parents walk into our center are, "***My child lacks confidence.***"

"Oh really?" A voice inside me says, "Maybe he is not interested in this but more interested in something else or maybe he is right now thinking about something else or maybe just like me he likes to be with himself or maybe he doesn't like being pushed (who does?) or maybe"



Or maybe we do not really understand confidence at all!

If I do not want to go on a stage in a fancy dress and say some dialogues, - do I lack confidence? If I do not want to go to a group of children and say to them, "I too want to play", - do I lack confidence?



There is this one thing that we all as parents need to understand and this would do mighty good to our children (as well as to our parenting anxiety) and that is to understand:

SELF confidence and SOCIAL confidence are different. Just because I do not have social confidence does not mean I do not have self confidence.

Social confidence is an ability to interact, assert and confront others.

Self confidence is the belief that I have the ability to do something well.



Which means social confidence is a subset of self confidence. So mere lack of social confidence does not mean I lack self confidence too. Many great scientists, doctors, engineers, sportspersons etc had high self confidence while having a not-too-high social confidence.



Look around and you will find many examples of people who do not have high social confidence but are extremely successful in their life, in their profession or field. Count me as one such example too.

Howard Gardner's multiple intelligence theory also distinguishes Interpersonal and Intrapersonal as two different intelligences. Which clarifies further that someone having high Intrapersonal intelligence (here self-confidence) may not naturally have innate interpersonal intelligence (here social confidence).

So everytime the child chooses not to talk or not to go on a stage or not do something maybe it's a signal that the child is listening to 'self', exploring self and hence need not be tagged as 'low on confidence '.

So now, Is your child confident?

And what is more important: being socially confident or being self confident?



**IF NOT
CONFIDENCE,
THEN
WHAT?**

Many of us tend to believe that to be able to do something, accomplish and achieve something; we need to have **high self confidence.**

Some years back we decided to make some films on parenting and we decided to shoot 'how children work'.

Four of our facilitators were supposed to conduct a session, in front of the lights and cameras, with children.



Now we all know that it takes quite a bit of courage to be in front of the camera. Couple of our facilitators were extremely nervous and not confident of doing a session in front of the camera. So much so, that on the day of the shoot, one of the facilitators asked me, "Can I back out? Is there some way I can quit this?"



What finally happened was that in spite of being not at all confident, they went ahead and actually did quite a good job. Not only did they do it well, but just after doing it they also became, suddenly, very confident of doing a session in front of the camera.

So what happened to our belief that we need confidence, as a prerequisite to be able to do something well? I guess, not only the above example, but if we all look into our past, we will find examples of when we went ahead and accomplished something in spite of being not at all confident about it.

So, is confidence not necessary to be able to do something or do it well?



I am not trying to say that confidence will not help. If I have confidence, then it is much easier for me to do something - no doubt about that. But confidence is not a pre-condition. I can be not confident and still go ahead and do it - and that's how sometimes we operate.

This means, there must be something else that helps us in doing things when we are nervous or unconfident . So what is this something that helps us take a leap of courage? Where does this "let me try" come from?

To me this comes from **self belief**.

A belief, if I try, I might just succeed.
A belief, if present, will make us go ahead and attempt and if absent, will make us find excuses not to try!



This means that self belief is far bigger than self confidence. Or rather, self confidence comes out of being able to do something, which comes out of self belief. Obviously, the more I do, and meet success, the more confident I get. But the starting point, the initial push came from self belief.



Just an example here - infants have little self confidence that they will be able to walk. In fact they meet with more failures than successes, while trying to do so. But, they have a huge self belief that drives them, a conviction that they can do it.



So self confidence becomes more of a function of my abilities and my recent experience with exercising these abilities. For example, the newspaper wrote, after the Indian cricket team lost the first few matches against west-Indies, that "the Indian team is low on confidence". Nobody really doubts the capability set of the team (just like I had no doubt about the ability of my facilitators to take sessions in front of the camera).

So what made confidence low? Is confidence constant or wavering? What is then more permanent? What could make the team still win in spite of having low confidence? Should I focus on building confidence or something else?

Somewhere self belief makes all the difference. What I am trying to say is "My being able to do or not do things is not a function of confidence but a function of omnipresent, more permanent and more pervasive self belief.

This self belief is what we are all born with and by itself is not a function of how good we are at doing something, rather it is the engine that makes us all natural explorers when we are small.



So somewhere parents and other people around erode this inherent self belief in many different ways and then as the child grows we start wondering why he or she is not confident.

One more important aspect here - sometimes we do not have the confidence, but somebody pushes us, somebody who inspires us, somebody who believes in us. Indirectly somebody instills or builds that self belief in us.

Does that mean that our most important role as parents is to instill that self belief in our child?



A belief that says, "Success or failure, just go ahead and do what you want to do". This means as a child, I continue to believe in myself and then when others around me reinforce this belief in me.

Are we too much behind confidence building? Do we actually show the belief in the child rather than just pushing the child?



So instead of egging the child by something like "go - go - go - do - it", can we not turn to the child and, from deep inside us, show (and not tell) the child genuinely - "yes, you can do it, I am sure you can do it, I believe you can do it."



They say ‘ action speaks louder than words ’ . Here are a few things we can do to show we believe in our child.

So self confidence becomes more of a self generative process: I do it out of my self belief and since I am able to do it, **I feel more confident. And since I feel more confident I do it better next time and get more confidence and so on. - I feel more confident and since I feel more confident - I do it better next time and I get more confident and so on.** So you see, the seed of self belief was all that was needed. .

But what happens when, based on my self belief, I go ahead and try and FAIL! Obviously my confidence would be even lower - or in negative. Which means to try again, I need more self belief. How do I get that?



**UNTANGALING
CONFIDENCE**



In spite of having self confidence, we "fail" sometimes. Is there something more fundamental, something that needs to be taken care of irrespective of high or low confidence?

During the football World Cup finals, the game ended in a draw and penalty shoot-out was to decide the winner. Now in such a scenario - why is that one player hits the perfect penalty while the other just fails.

Remember, each of these are world class players and have possibly practiced and shot penalties a thousand times. There is no dearth of ability. Beyond luck - is there something else that shakes the confidence of a player and he misses?

What is obvious in both the above scenarios is that emotions are the underlying factor



Another scenario, let's say there is an emergency, say a fire. Now all of us know what we need to do in such an emergency situation.



Again ability is not the issue! Before the panic situation is triggered each one of us is aware of the measures that need to be taken, but the moment the emergency button is switched on, we react differently. Then why do some of us panic or get frozen, while others act appropriately.

What is obvious in both the above scenarios is that ***emotions are the underlying factor***

The one emerging as the successful person/ winner has managed emotions better during the stressful situation, while the unsuccessful has let the pressure play on them.

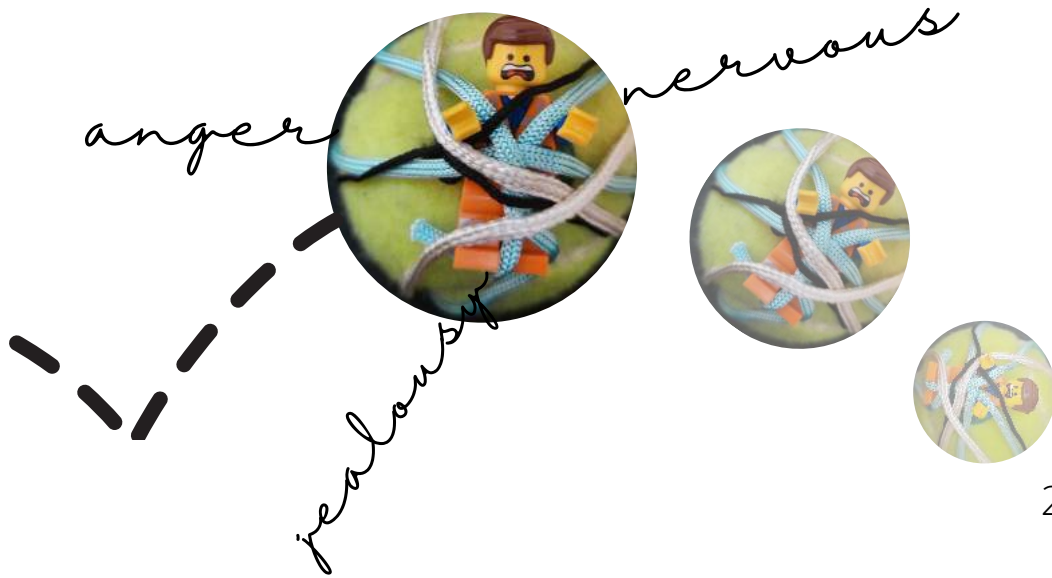
Which means it is not just enough to develop my ability, to develop my confidence, for the best of the confidence can go down the drain, if we are not emotionally mature enough to handle it.



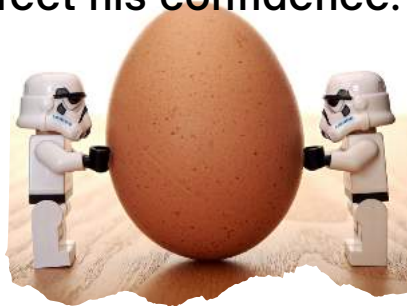
People with the best of the abilities give in to emotions rather than being able to manage or regulate them. Surprisingly this ability to manage our emotions does not come by repetitive experience.

One emotional stimulus, and thinking goes haywire and decisions become impulsive, behavior turns counterproductive, while I was cool and confident in the first place. So while my confidence (or skill?) increases on a task by repetitive exposure, learning to manage emotions is a completely different ball game which some of us never learn in a lifetime. No wonder some of us continue to be short tempered, or escapist or undependable or hurtful all our lives.

Ultimately, having the ability to manage emotions is more fundamental and it directly affects our confidence. Hence, it's very important that we "teach" our children to understand emotions, and be emotionally intelligent. That is the base on which the child will operate through confidence.



I remember an incident that happened to an excellent speaker, whom I had high regard for. In one of his presentations, somebody made an unreasonable remark which enraged the speaker and it led to an altercation which made the matters worse and the whole event went for a toss. For that one emotional event, he let the whole gathering and his reputation suffer. All he needed was to manage the emotionally disturbing remark better and ensure that it did not affect his confidence.



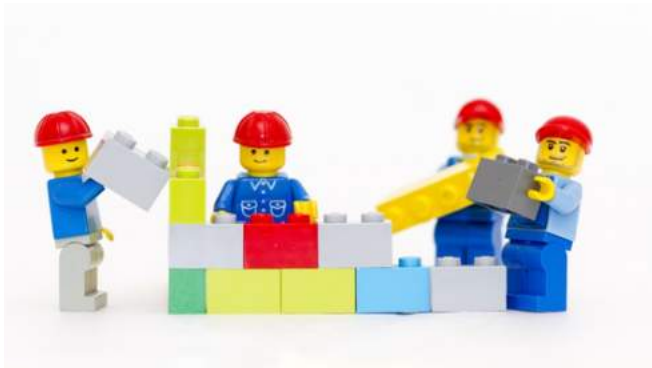
Surprisingly the whole education curriculum from kindergarten to higher education has never paid heed to emotional development. It is then up to us parents that **we together with children deep dive into understanding**, exploring and realizing the full potential of this vital energy of our emotions. Simply learning to manage emotions might not be sufficient, rather practicing to put them to our advantage can bring upon stability leading to effective and successful decisions in life, which in turn might bring confidence to our children.

Over to you dear reader to explore emotions!



**BELIEVE TO
RELIEVE
CONFIDENCE**

A Chinese couple, with their two and half year old daughter came to our centre for admission. They had withdrawn her from another school, because their daughter was not ready to go to other children, not ready to mix or play with them and was in fact getting scared of other children. Add to this the fact that the child (and even the mother) did not know English or any other Indian language.



After a few weeks the father called me and gladly informed me that now she mixes with other children and has become more expressive and ‘confident’ of herself.

When most people talk of confidence, they talk of it as if this is something the child SHOULD have. In fact a lot of people get irritated when the child does not show confidence. And they start pushing the child thinking it will COME OUT of the child on its own. That results in even lesser confidence in the child.

But what would happen if we were to operate WITH FULL CONFIDENCE IN THE CHILD. ***If no matter what the child does - we communicate in many different ways - that we are confident of you and your abilities.***



What our team of facilitators did was to consistently show confidence in the Chinese girl, through Patience, Persistence and Perception. They communicated to her that even if she chose not to mix, we were confident that she **COULD** mix with other children when she wanted to. No wonder, within a month she could get magic out of herself.





One other day when I was playing tennis with my friend one ball went out of the fence. My partner's four year old ran and collected the ball to throw it over the tall fence back to us.

Even before the boy could try, my partner said, "Come through the gate, you will not be able to throw it". The child ignored, tried, failed, and the ball fell back on his side of the fence. The partner chided, "I told you...".



I quickly intervened and said to my friend, "Let him try, I am sure he can throw, we will wait" and then I addressed the child, "Come on Sidharth, throw". The child failed six times, and as the father grew even more restless, the seventh attempt saw the ball come to us sailing over the fence with a big triumph on the child (and my face too! :-)

Realize just like the facilitators (to the Chinese girl), I showed perception first, to sense that the child wants to try something, hitherto out of his reach. Then I showed patience and persistence as he tried and failed. But I could do all of this only because I had **CONFIDENCE** in the child.



Believing in the child or having confidence in the child has nothing to do with the child being able to do it. It may not help the child when we approach with expectations of a favourable outcome or successful result. Can we instead invite the child to try, fail, explore and expand his or her abilities to the fullest.

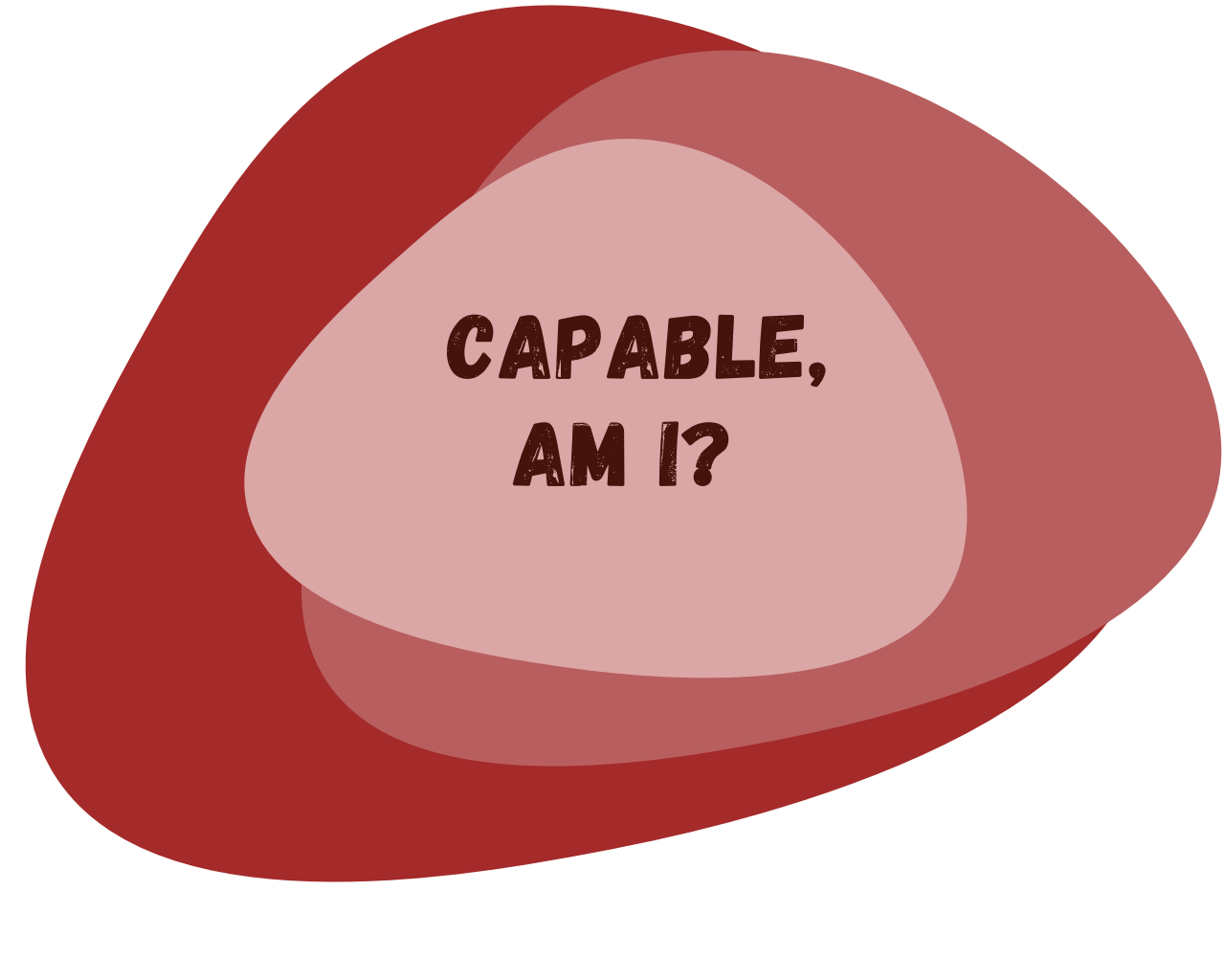


To me the biggest myth of confidence is that "children should have it" and the biggest secret of developing it is to "act as if they have 'it' (their ability to do it)".

The difference as exemplified above is huge. What happens when we show this kind of belief in our child is that it in turn builds tremendous self-belief in the child - a force that we believe is responsible for all the achievements of mankind.

What we are proposing here is- let's neither limit the child nor motivate/encourage the child, rather give the child the space and opportunities to drive self using her internal engine, her power within. Our role then becomes less of wanting and more of believing.





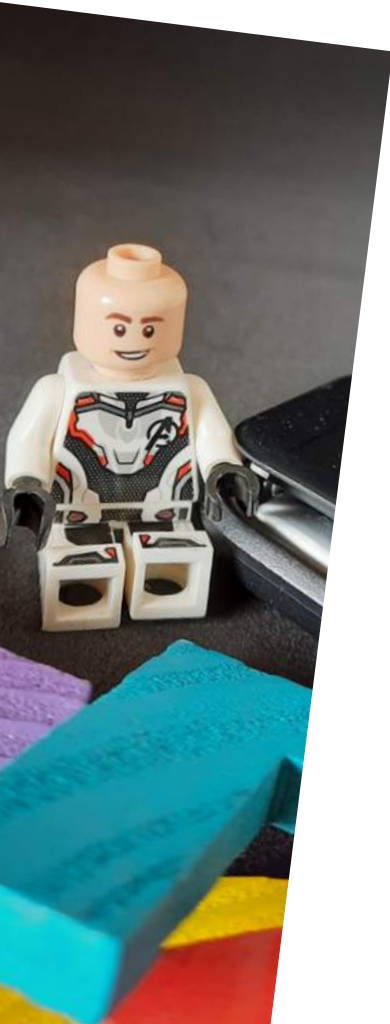
**CAPABLE,
AM I?**

A friend of mine commented, "Why is it that the second child is normally more outgoing, more confident, more assertive, etc."

This made me think and realize that while I may not totally agree with the generalization he made, it is not a mere coincidence that most parents, who complain about their child being not so confident or shy, are usually talking about either their first child or their only child. Rarely is it the second child who is talked about in terms of being "less confident."

What I also realized, from my extensive work with parents, is that many first time parents are far more tentative, anxious and not too confident about their parenting leading them to be somewhat over protective, cautious and hence restrictive with their child. But by the time they have a second child, they are seasoned, they understand the child's development better. They realize many things that they were anxious about got sorted out on their own and so on.





Hence, automatically they start letting go of their second child more. They are more open to give their second child autonomy, independence and above all are far more relaxed and exude confidence in front of the child.

Hence, the observation of my friend was not totally misplaced. Second child, purely from a learning curve point of view, gets a better deal - especially in terms of opportunities made available to develop into a more confident individual.

This also raises a point which is quite funny too, that while all professions in this world require extensive training and learning - parenting - one of the most important professions is left totally to our instincts (or conditioning) resulting in its ineffectiveness.

Hence, it becomes important for us as parents to learn about our child's development. It is important for us to know and understand the stages of a child's development and to give our children developmentally appropriate environments and opportunities.



Given we act according to these stages; I have no doubt children will automatically grow into confident human beings.

So here is the Myth - **"the child should be confident in the same way at all ages"**. Nothing could be far from reality, especially if one understands Erik Erikson's stages of child's development.



According to him, at birth an infant starts with the first stage where he or she builds TRUST about himself as well as the world at large based on trustworthy behavior shown by adults around him. With parents offering a strong base of security and trust, the child begins venturing out as he enters his second stage of development. The child starts building AUTONOMY in the toddler years, which morphs into the third stage - INITIATIVE, (in "safe" environments) during the pre-school years.

Misha loved to help her mother around the house. She decided it was time to wash the dirty sliding door. So she picked the window cleaner and a white rag lying by the washing machine. The window was really dirty which sparkled after cleaning. Just then mother entered and saw Misha holding her white blouse now extremely dirty. What do you think Mom should do? It was her favorite blouse.





Realize that confidence is under construction during these three stages and many times very situational - say a child may be very confident inside home but not in a friend's home or very confident with her regular teacher but not with a new teacher or very confident with familiar toys but tentative about new ones and so on.

It's only in the 'school age' years, according to Erikson, when the child is actually building competence in many fields that the child automatically starts showing confidence and then independence and responsibility naturally flows.



However, the most important understanding that Erikson gave is not the stages itself, but *how success in any stage is dependent on the favorable outcomes of the previous stage. Which means that a child needs a favorable environment, interactions and opportunities at each stage, from us parents, to be able to move successfully into the next developmental stage.*

So the next time you think that your child is not confident, think on two lines - One , which stage is she in and what inputs she needs at this stage to make her finally a confident individual in life. Two, what were the inputs that were appropriate for the previous stages and if not offered, how can one make up for the time lost.

For example, before we want the child to be socially interdependent (say sharing), have we given the child opportunities to develop independence first. Obviously, as even Stephen Covey remarked, ***independence precedes interdependence.***



Also what my friend made me realize - even more - how important it is for first time parents to learn and be trained - for the benefit of their child. So if you are a first time parent (and even a second second timer) do invest your time in reading articles, books, attending workshops etc to understand your child's development better.





**PLAYFULLY
YOURS**

Free play will make your child confident

I was sitting in the children's park, watching my child tumble over the various play equipment. There were also a few 5-6 year-old girls engrossed in their pretend-play. That's when I overheard the conversation between these girls' mothers:



"I want to enroll my daughter in a painting class."

"I want a handwriting class, do you know any?"

"No I don't, but yesterday I found a good dance class. The only problem is which day will I take her to dance?"

"Dance, even I want to enroll my daughter. Instead of wasting their time like this, (pointing at the girls playing) at least dancing will make her confident."

"What about play?" I wanted to butt into their conversation.

"What about the confidence they are developing right now, absolutely free of cost?"

It is surprising that more and more children are being forced into classes after classes, while according to all child development researchers in the past 150 years, free play will make a bigger difference in a child's own ability to think, to imagine, to make decisions, to learn and to develop confidence.



It's a myth that just because I am "made to learn something" that will make me more confident. *Unless I have the **freedom to explore, to think, to express, to make decisions, to make mistakes**, it's unlikely that I will build confidence.*

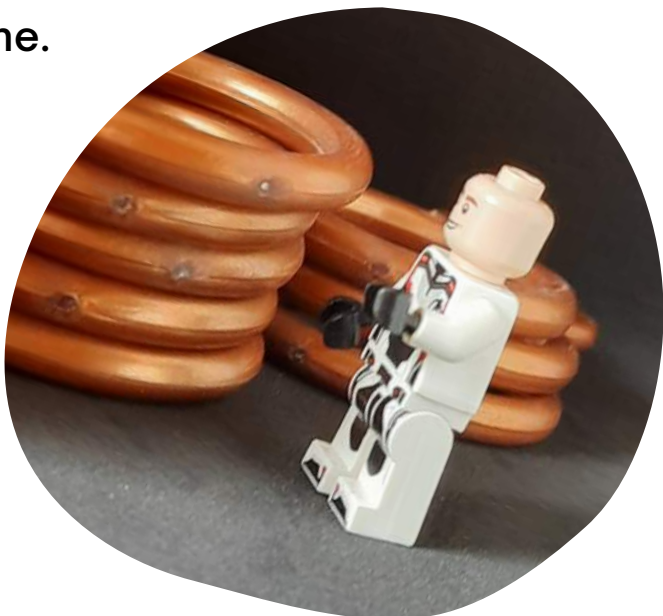


Three problems with structured classes are that invariably there are expectations (of performance), there are comparisons (between children and to a benchmark) and there is right and wrong. Each one of these is definitely non-conducive to building confidence.



This myth stems possibly from a combination of unawareness, lack of time and some sense of self-inadequacy (which parents often try to fulfill through their children). Result more children are attending structured classes at much younger ages than you can imagine.

Free play in contrast is amazingly effective in building confidence. Let me list ***five reasons why and also how you can do it.***





1. Free Play **focuses on thinking**, structured learning focuses on acquiring knowledge. Let your child build his own experiments, do his own cause effect analysis, develop his own mental models and come to his own conclusions

2. Since Free Play does not have any expectations, it is **stress free**. A whole lot of us actually lose confidence if the pressure of performance is there. See if you can start the children off without an expression of expectation.





3. Free Play is **internally motivated** compared to structured learning which is typically driven externally. Since children have unlimited internal resources, active inside-out play is very empowering. For a child, the free play time with others as well as with himself (or herself) is equally significant. Children do engage in their imaginary world of play and dialogues with themselves, which is a natural part of their growing years. That's the time when they are processing the gathered information and acting on their will. They are building self.

4. Free play **develops decision making** while in structured play most decisions are either pre-made (that's the structure part) or teacher-made (that's the teaching part). Since decision making is so vital in developing confidence, allow as much of the child making decisions in your playtime with the child.





5. In Free play there is **no right or wrong**. This to me is the biggest reason why I propagate free play as an integral part of (confidence) development. Simply put, will you thrive in an environment where your mistakes are constantly highlighted? In spite of this realization, most adults, when with children, are constantly correcting them. Especially in a class, where the adult has an additional responsibility of making the child 'learn'.

Let's cut out judgments; involve ourselves, be present, go out and simply enjoy being with the child.

Both of my children learnt to swim without a coach or training camps. We would frequently go to the pool and the simple thought on our mind was - PLAY. They would jump, splash, wade around with no effort to learn how to swim. There were no instructions or guidance given to them by either of the parents.

You guessed it, by having no judgement rather by being in the present to enjoy ourselves, both my daughter and son learned to swim on their own after a few years of exploration and they do swim well.



Perhaps, a lot of abilities come naturally from immersion in something. Let children be free to develop their abilities by curating their experiences.

The next time when your child says, “5 minutes more! (on the playground)”, appreciate it with a thought that - “my child is indulging in ‘Significant Educational Self-Endeavor!’” - for surely that is what free play is!





**LACK
CONFIDENCE?
HACK
CONFIDENCE!**



One of the trainees in our Train the Trainer program told me that she lacks confidence. I asked, "Who says so"?

Little befuddled by the question, she replied plainly "I".

I clarified, "So it's the 'I', who lacks confidence that is telling you that you lack confidence?"

Still befuddled, she replied, "Yes."



I asked further, "So what does 'I', who is confident, tell you?" Now completely befuddled, she asked "What do you mean, 'I that is confident'? To clarify, I asked, "Is there something - anything at all - in your life that you have done and can still do confidently"?

She said "Yes"

"So there is **part of you that is confident and part of you that lacks confidence.**

"Hmmm..."

"Your problem is that you **listen to the later part too much**"

Four conclusions from above:

1. Before we judge the child as being not confident, we need to 'look for' confidence already existing.

Children at an early age need exposure to many different kinds of activities - so that 'some' of these exposures will sow confidence. Just as, since nature knows that only few seeds will succeed and most will perish, a tree simply produces more.



Similarly we need not worry about fields in which the child is able and the fields in which the child is unable. We would rather just expose the child to as many fields as possible. Invariably confidence will sprout and spring in some fields.



2. It doesn't matter 'where' we find confidence in a child, till we keep discovering it.

If my child can't jump confidently, I will ask her to twist, or draw, dribble, paint, sing, dance, cook, serve, arrange, throw, catch, search, ...

As many seeds I can sow, I shall; soon I am assured of a decent crop!



So perhaps as parents what we can do, if we want, make a list of all the areas in which the child is already showing confidence and maybe the same list for myself. So that we realise that we are never confident in all the fields that are there in our lives - like maybe you are not confident right now in juggling three balls (let alone juggling three ceramic mugs :))



3. If we have confidence in one way (one field), we can transfer that to another way (field).

Once I have a decent crop - then the **law of pollination** starts acting. As a child gets confident in one field, the other fields automatically get a rub off.

Further we help the child to transfer these positive pollinations to areas of the child's life which need them. This is called modeling. Let's understand this with some examples:



A child was very quiet - she would hardly speak to anybody. We noticed that she was really observant and hence her drawings used to be very detailed.



We started acknowledging her drawing abilities and asked her to tell us what all she had drawn. Note, our interest here in her drawing was genuine. She started excitedly talking about her drawings and soon she opened up and started talking and communicating verbally.

Another child was extremely interested in football and cricket but in parents' words "hates writing." On a daily basis we asked him to teach the rest of us, about football and cricket - using written charts. His interest in writing soared, as did his ability to write.



4. Because of the three above, we actually never lack confidence; we might just be looking in the wrong place!

So to us, it's a **myth** that 'some children (or even some of us) lack confidence'.

Maybe because a lot of us act as if confidence should be there in children, all the time, genetically. In fact we demand confidence. We push the child, much against her wish, till we get a reluctant participant, who is even less confident.

*It's time we start realizing that small, meaningful, diverse confidence building experiences are much better for the child. **We start sowing before dreaming of a bumper crop. We start feeding before..***

A man went to a poultry shop and asked, "Do you have chicken?"

The shopkeeper replied, "It depends"

"What do you mean it depends ... on what?"

"Whether you want to eat it or feed it?" replied the shopkeeper.

"Obviously, eat it"

"In which case first go through that door and feed the chicken", directed the shopkeeper.

"And what if I wanted to feed the chicken in the first place?"

"Either ways, First we feed, then we eat", clarified the shopkeeper.

"But how will I ensure that the chicken I feed is the chicken I eat?"

"Oh! that's no worry here, since everybody who eats, also feeds!"



The background consists of three overlapping, organic, blob-like shapes. The largest shape on the left is a dark purple. Overlapping its right side is a medium-sized shape in a medium pink. Overlapping the right side of the medium pink shape is a large shape in a light pink. The text is centered within the light pink shape.

**HOW TO EAT AN
ELEPHANT**



Myth: *"If a child is not able to do something, is frustrated and wants to give up, he lacks confidence, or is not building confidence".*

The question here is **"How do you eat an elephant?"**
"Bite by Bite" - is the answer and nothing could be more important when developing confidence.

In a lot of cases when the child is unable and frustrated, all that the child needs is the task to be simplified, or broken in smaller tasks or the task approached step by step; the child needs a lower bar. *The child needs chunking!*

Chunking is a process of making the task smaller so that it matches the ability of the child (similar to how we will break the bread to be eaten into smaller chunks based on the size of mouth).

Two examples to elaborate this:

If I ask you to write an autobiographical essay, most of us feel the task is too humongous. However, if I first ask you to list all your achievements, then important milestones in life, then important relationships till date, then likes and dislikes, and so on.... soon the essay will be ready!





A lot of parents get irritated when their children make bad decisions (like choosing a dish in a restaurant, or buying a gift etc). They also label children as 'impulsive'.

My contention is that the children are never really exposed to the step by step process of making a good decision. As a result some of their decisions turn out bad. Maybe we can just let the children take more and also bigger decisions and guide them if required to break into manageable steps.

Too many times we as parents and teachers give children tasks or put them into situations which are too big at one shot. Or sometimes we end up doing it for them. Or worse we label them not confident. Not surprisingly they show lack of confidence.

Growth of ability in any task is sometimes and to some people, is simply a step by step process. When we see frustration or reluctance, it could be that the child needs chunking.



A boy was giving a trial for high jump in his school. His P.T. instructor, having set the 'bar', asked him to take the jump.



The child jumped and failed. He tried again and again he tripped the bar. After the third failed attempt, the boy asked, "Sir, can you lower the bar a little?"

His instructor willingly lowered the bar, the child tried and still failed. "A little lower sir", he requested.

His instructor lowered the bar further, the child tried and still failed. "A little lower sir", he requested again. His instructor further lowered it, but the boy's attempt still failed. "A little lower sir", he requested again.



*This time the instructor retorted, "Young man, what will you gain by lowering the bar every time?"
"Confidence, Sir", instantly came the boy's reply.*



**MIRROR MIRROR,
WHAT DO YOU
SAY?**

A knight of great courage/valor once stopped by a monastery. Boasting of his fighting and self-defense skills, he claimed, "No one in this part of the world can hurt me." The head monk, who had been all this while listening to the knight, said, in a scornful tone, "What a stupid guy!" Immediately the knight drew his sword, "How dare you?" The Zen master smiled and said, "See, you are already hurt."



The question here is, "Why do we get hurt (so easily)?"

The answer lies in this myth - **"We should have a strong self image"**





Millions of people, (specially fueled by advertising) are striving to bridge a gap between **what we are**, and **what we should be** or to be more precise **what people should see us as!**

The problem in this "catching the mirage" is inherent and closely related to self confidence. One can't be confident if one's self is quite different from the image one pursues.

I was quite disturbed many years back when a very intelligent and diligent friend of mine refused to appear for the IIT entrance exam because she was afraid of facing her image of, 'what if she fails'. I see a lot of young children today lack confidence because they have too soon in life been given an image to live up to. "Better to not attempt, than fail" seems to be the motto. So much for confidence!





That brings us to another question, "Why do we often lack confidence in doing something? Why do our own expectations and ensuing anxiety of "failing" diminish our abilities to naught?"

I used to think that a large portion of this information happens in middle and high school, when peer comparison, performance expectations and clichéd success definitions become omnipresent. Unfortunately, I recently met a father of a 2.5-year-old with equal concerns.



The father lamely passes a remark, “my son is smart” and the child is burdened to live up to the smartness, which holds him back from stepping into a zone which might challenge his smartness. ***A desirable self-image and too much of result orientation becomes a huge mental block towards gaining and building confidence.*** However, it would seem logical to appreciate the efforts and let the child enjoy the trials, even if it feels unreasonable for you to hold back your quick fix solutions.



Self-image is about putting labels; confidence is experimenting with those labels.

Incidentally, this also leads to a more relaxed and happy mind.



A young lad sat straight at the barber's high chair. The barber asked, "Who do you want to look like?"

Confused with the question the child answered, quite obviously, "Me!"

The barber tried again, "Whose kind of style do you want?"

The child's answer was quite matter of fact, "Mine!"



The barber persisted, "What kind of hair do you want?"

The child said clearly, "I already have hair, just cut it."

The barber tried one last time, "But what kind of look do you want me to give you".

The child thought for a moment and replied, "The kind that suits me."



**OUT BEYOND
CONFIDENCE**

The biggest myth of confidence is that 'confidence is very important'!

It is so much of a belief that people who lack self confidence actually freeze, they stop themselves from trying, claiming that they have no confidence.

A man climbed up a mountain and on reaching the peak shouted "I am at the top".

"Are you sure?" a calm voice asked.



The man looked around, couldn't see anything higher than himself, so said again, "I AM at the top."

"Are you sure?" the calm voice repeated.



The man was confused, little unsure now, "I think I am at the top"

"And who is telling you that?" the voice inquired.

"My mind", replied the man.

"Now point at yourself", the voice directed.

The man pointed a finger at his chest.

"When I say yourself, you point at your heart, while who is at the top, is your mind", the voice concluded.

Is confidence really that important?

Is there something more important? Something that will help us achieve more?

Here is my list of things more important than self confidence.

- *An attitude of let me try - even if the attempt fails.*
- *A realization that I NEVER FAIL - only an attempt fails!*
- *An approach that each experience is more important - not whether that makes us less or more confident - rather it does leave us more WISER.*



- *An understanding that whether I tasted success or failure - its history - hence - "carpe diem" (means *seize the day*)*
- *And perhaps the most important life's operating principle - "Keep Learning"*



You may or may not agree with the relative importance of these versus confidence - but do look at these invaluable insights provided by the great educationist John Dewey. These five quotations would illustrate and guide you as a parent to develop the above list in your child:

1) Knowledge is the tool for managing experience - no such thing as genuine knowledge and fruitful understanding except as the offspring of doing.



Rather than just bringing knowledge, can I create an environment where the child can experience that by doing. E.g. rather than giving him knowledge of fruits and vegetables, what if I take him to the wholesale vegetable market and ask him to choose vegetables for the whole family for a week? Which may not only bring the experience of different vegetables and fruits to the child but might also bring the whole idea of weighting, quantity, colors, appetite, cooking, bargaining and so on..

2) Thinking is the method of intelligent learning, of learning that employs and rewards the mind.

Imagine a child coming to me and asking “How does an airplane fly?” If I'm researching and sharing my understanding / gyan with the child then I am doing all the thinking.

However, I could instead ask the child to share his thinking and then get him to build his understanding via his research, his doing, his thinking.

The idea is to let the child do the thinking, with our support.



3) The great thing is not to avoid mistakes but to have them take place under conditions such that they can be utilized to increase intelligence in the future.

One way to let child explore with sweetness is to tell the child how many spoons of sugar he need to add in his milk, where in here what is suggested is - what if we let the child explore adding as many number of spoons of sugar as he wants to his milk so that he experiences bland to extra sweetened milk, all different taste of milk with each quantity.



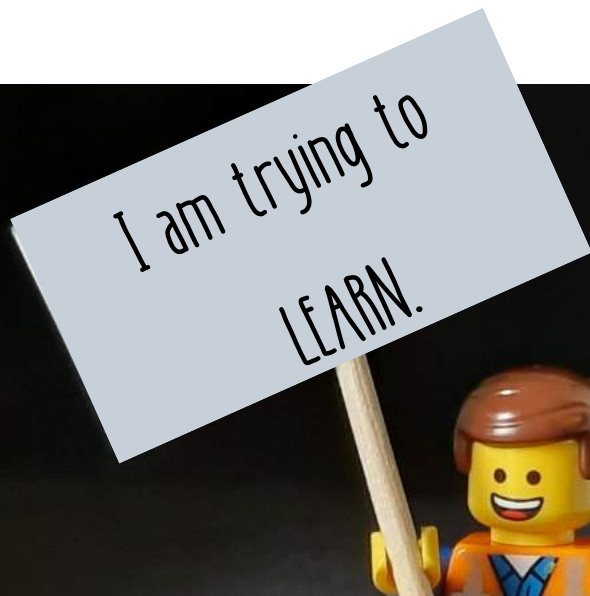
4) As an individual passes from one situation to another, his world, his environment, expands or contracts. What he has learned in the way of knowledge and skill in one situation becomes an instrument of understanding and dealing effectively with the situations which follow.

Let's say a child is struggling to open the bottle. When the child shares the struggle, we can ask the child where all he has been using twisting in his day to day life. Like, opening a tap or stirring the spoon and so on.

We can ask the child to transfer the same concept of opening a tap even here. This way his learnings from one environment to another will expand.



In the same way, if a child loves playing with lego and constructing different things then maybe when he is trying to make music on the computer , he can use the same logic of building notes and create that piece of music.



5) Learning is active. It involves reaching out of the mind. It involves organic assimilation starting from within. It is the child and not the subject-matter which determines both the quality and quantity of learning.

So here in our understanding, it's the child who is deciding what and how much to learn from each experience of life. Every experience brings learning and every learning stimulates the brain which is shifting from discomfort to comfort and vice-versa.



Isn't confidence all about learning? Isn't learning all about growing oneself from within? Doesn't growing means constantly stretching oneself from the zone of comfort into the zone of discomfort?

As John Dewey said, "Education is not a preparation for life; education is life itself!"





**THE INNER
BEING**

I thought the last article was the last I would write in this series of articles on confidence. Then my friend popped up with a question, "So what is your secret of being confident? Did your parents follow these principles you have been talking about?"

This made me reflect upon my own childhood and the way my parents went about raising me. Coincidentally at the same time I was working on the workshop on **'Learning from CARL ROGERS'**.



At least two of the three principles Carl Rogers based his whole work on, were consistently used by my parents too, both I can immediately relate to me being confident in my life - confident enough to achieve whatever I wanted to achieve.

The two principles are parenting by forming relationships based on

- * Unconditional Acceptance and
- * Empathic Interactions





Somewhere all along my childhood, whether I almost always played all ALONE, whether I preferred to play-play and play games all day long, whether my rank was in the lower half of the class, whether all I ate was sugar-chapati, I was always accepted. While my parents did suggest what they would like me to do, at no stage they scoffed or frowned, or fretted over my idiosyncrasies.

Also, as I went through my own ups and downs, as any childhood would present, they always showed an understanding side of theirs rather than a commanding or condemning one. This approach, more often than not, left me to find my own ways, after they had ensured that they had communicated their understanding (as well as their concerns). This empathetic way of interacting at every level, left me more self reliant, more independent of my own thinking and choosing.



Both of these ways of working with children are, according to me, often misunderstood and more lip serviced than actually practiced by parents.

If you find in your 14 year old boy's cupboard, a sleazy porn magazine, how will you respond?

After summoning both me and my elder brother, this is how my parents responded,

My mother said, "I have found this in your cupboard.



I understand that at this age curiosity about sex is high, so wanting to explore sex is quite natural. However I am concerned about three things:

One, these kinds of magazines give a lot of misleading information and views about sex and about women.

Two, these kinds of magazines could be addictive and would divert you from your studies which at this stage are more important.

Three, if you have any friends that are leading you to all of these, then beware, a lot of what we become and do depends upon the kind of company we keep.

I am sure both of you are mature enough to understand the three things we just told you. Both of you can approach any of us if you need any information. If you feel shy, we can even get you magazines or books which give the right picture of sex."

While there are multiple parenting lessons in the way my parents responded, it's to me a true example of complete acceptance and empathetic understanding.



I leave it to your imagination, what kind of confidence in one's thinking, one's ability to discern what is right and wrong, one's faith in oneself will this kind of approach build.

Acceptance is not to be confused with resignation. It is to do with the belief that intentions are always right. If they are accepted, behavior can be redirected.

Acceptance is not to be confused with pampering. Pampering is freedom without responsibility. True freedom leads to responsibility of one's thoughts and actions.



Empathy is not to be confused with sympathy. Sympathy is to pity or feel for another's situation. Empathy is to only understand the feelings another is going through.

Empathy is not to be confused with being emotional. We all ARE emotional. To me we cannot not have feelings. Empathy is how we relate to those feelings.



Confidence then is a function of many things - but definitely more internal resources than external. It becomes imperative then as parents that instead of blindly following societal fads, insecure expectations and short term results, we sensitively work with the child's inner being, through fundamental developmental approaches based on acceptance and understanding.



The end page of this book is blank - a very good place to start - lets rebuild our thinking of ourselves, our children, about learning and life.

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