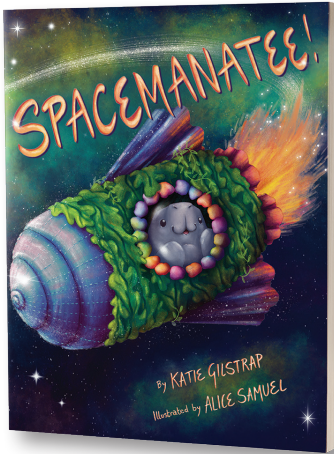




AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Help Your Child Reach for the Stars: Three Tips for Fostering Self-Confidence



Anna Lee, star of the new picture book *Spacemanatee*, is one confident manatee! Chances are she wasn't born fully confident in but that she developed a sense of self-confidence through life experiences, which can include mastering new skills, learning to handle challenges, and having the space and support to explore new things. As a parent or caregiver, you have many opportunities to help foster your child's self-confidence and belief in their dreams.

Here is an excerpt from *Spacemanatee's* Reader's Note by psychologist, Julia Martin Burch, with three tips fostering kids' self-confidence. You can purchase the full book with 20% off and free domestic shipping [here](#) and entering code MPKIDS20 at checkout.

Help your child learn new skills

From a young age, teach your child how to take care of themselves, their possessions, and the world around them. Children feel proud, competent, and self-reliant—building blocks of self-confidence—when they know they are capable.

Give your child responsibilities around the house. Even very young children can do small tasks like moving laundry from the washer to the dryer. As your child becomes more confident in their ability to do daily tasks, increase their level of independence and responsibility. When your child inevitably struggles, teach them how to talk to themselves through the challenge. It can be helpful to ask them what they would say to a friend who was in a similar position. For example, they might say to themselves, "this is hard, but I'm good at solving problems. I can do it!"

Let them get messy

Self-confidence does not develop in a vacuum. Children must struggle, make mistakes, and navigate their own way through challenges with an age-appropriate degree of independence. This powerful cycle helps to instill in children a sense that they can handle future challenges which in turn increases their self-confidence.

WWW.APA.ORG/PUBS/MAGINATION/SPACEMANATEE

To support this, strive to create a mistake-friendly culture in your family in which all family members are encouraged to take (appropriate) risks in pursuit of their interests and dreams. When your child struggles or makes mistakes, be there for them emotionally, but resist the well-intended urge to swoop in and protect them from the emotional discomfort. Experiencing small doses of disappointment and sadness gives children an opportunity to practice coping with those emotions and coming out stronger on the other side. It is particularly powerful for the development of self-confidence for a child to know that they handled a problem using their own internal resources.

Support their Manatee dreams!

As you know, children tend to have all kinds of wild and wonderful beliefs and dreams—much like a manatee on the moon! Listen curiously and non-judgmentally when your child shares their interests. Ask open ended questions such as “what excites you about that?” or “what would be the most fun and the hardest things about that?”

Resist the urge to share practical advice on how realistic their ideas or passions might be. Instead, strive to share their enthusiasm. Help them think through what they might do to chase their dreams. When your child pursues new interests, praise their efforts, and help them reflect on how it feels to go after their dreams—no matter how it went! For example, you might say “I love how you were willing to try gymnastics even though you have never done it before! How did it feel to try something you have been interested in for so long?” Helping your child reflect on how good it feels to pursue their dreams—even when there are bumps in the road—helps to instill internal motivation to keep trying.

This Article’s Author

Katie Gilstrap, wildlife advocate and space enthusiast, earned her Master of Arts in English from Kansas State University. Diagnosed with obsessive-compulsive disorder as an adolescent, Katie now strives to celebrate neurodiversity in children’s literature by writing kid-friendly books that inspire confidence, courage, and self-acceptance. Though she is now a full-time author, most of her writerly inspiration stems from the years she spent working as a veterinary technician. *Spacemanatee!* is her first book. She currently lives in south central Kansas.

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Julia Martin Burch, PhD, is a clinical psychologist in private practice. She specializes in evidence-based treatments, including cognitive behavior therapy and exposure and response prevention therapy for youth anxiety, obsessive compulsive, and related disorders. She completed her training at Fairleigh Dickinson University and Massachusetts General Hospital/Harvard Medical School.

Spacemanatee!

Anna Lee is a sweet-natured manatee whose dreams are even bigger than her mighty flippers.

Every night, Anna Lee Manatee meets with her friend, The Loon, to stargaze. When Anna Lee shares her belief of a “Manatee on the Moon,” The Loon mocks her seemingly far-fetched idea. Determined to validate her beliefs, Anna Lee constructs a rocket ship out of materials she finds in the sea and blasts off to outer space. Will she find what she is looking for?

This is a sweet story that helps kids believe in themselves so they can reach new heights.