



Confidence Summary

Why Confidence?

Two-year-olds build their social and emotional skills through loving interactions with you and your responses to their needs. As children develop their social and emotional skills, they also build their sense of confidence. Confidence begins with the trusting relationship you work to develop with your child. The bond you have with your child forms a solid foundation from which your child can feel safe to explore the world.

Step 1. Get Your Child Thinking by Getting Their Input

- You can get your child thinking about building confidence by asking them open-ended questions.
- Ask your child, *"How do you feel? How do you think I feel?"* Two-year-olds do not yet have a feelings vocabulary and are not able to describe their body sensations when they are upset or dealing with any big feeling.
 - For example, if your child is making a disagreeable facial expression, say, *"Freeze,"* like a game. Pull out the mirror, ask them to repeat the face, and ask about what that facial expression represents. For example, *"Your eyebrows are squished down, and there's a line in your forehead. Are you feeling mad?"*
- When reading books, look at the images of children or animals and guess the feelings by asking, *"What do you think that character is feeling?"*
- If your child is feeling unsure about how others are feeling -- or buried in their own feelings -- help them by sharing what you think others are feeling. You could say: *"I wonder if that person is feeling sad because their head is hanging down and their mouth is frowning. Do you think they feel sad?"* Or, *"I think that person might be feeling angry because their face is red and their eyebrows are scrunched up. Do you think they feel angry?"*
- Practicing naming feelings will enable your child to identify their own feelings as well as others and seek support when they need it. This can help reduce the length and strength of tantrums as your child gains emotional competence.

Step 2. Teach New Skills by Interactive Modeling

- Read and “pretend play” together.
 - During reading time, select a book with faces to help your child learn to identify the different feelings. Point out how you can tell what each face is feeling, and practice recreating those cues with your child.
 - After reading a story together, act out the story and use feeling words and expressions to match how the characters were feeling throughout the story. This expands their feelings vocabulary and teaches them how to recognize a wide range of perspectives and feelings that they might not encounter in day-to-day interactions with others.
- Share your thoughts and feelings. Talk about how you are feeling, why you are feeling that way, and what signs you are giving even when it’s not a comfortable feeling. *“I am frustrated right now because I cannot get the seat belt to work. Can you tell? My face is red and getting hot.”*
- Talk aloud about the ways you respond to your own big feelings: *“I’m going to take a few deep breaths before trying again and see if that helps.”*
- Develop empathetic thinking. In addition to developing these essential skills that lead your children to build confidence, there are beliefs and attitudes that you can promote to contribute to your child’s thinking. For example, if your child sees their friend crying, you could say:
 - *“It looks like your friend is crying. Do you think they are feeling sad?”*
 - *“What do you think we could do to make them feel better? Do you think we could go over and check on them?”*
- Play act anger. In a calm moment, create a drama in which you feel angry. Describe how you are feeling and why. *“This doll took my toy. I feel so mad. My face feels hot. I feel like I want to growl.”* Then, shift to what could make you feel better. *“How could I help myself feel better?”* you might ask your child. Create ideas and try them out together. *“I could hug a pillow tight. I could draw with crayons or pound on playdoh.”* Make sure that the ideas you try are ones you want to teach your child to use when they are truly angry.
- Practice deep breathing. When you are putting your child to bed, give a teddy bear a ride on your tummy as you breathe in and out deeply. Have your child try it.

Tip Use play acting when your child is angry. Gently remind: *“Do you remember how we felt better when we play acted that we were angry?”* If your child can’t recall, show them how you hug a pillow tightly to help yourself feel better. Don’t forget to take deep breaths together.

Trap Don’t tell your child what they feel; ask instead. Two-to-three-year-olds are striving for independence, and it may create a power struggle if you are too directive about their thoughts and feelings. You might say, *“You look angry. Is that right?”*

Step 3. **Practice** to Grow Skills, Confidence, and Develop Habits

- Allow your child the chance to take steps to meet their big challenges, whether they are working on tasting new foods for the first time, exploring the objects in their environment, or attempting to communicate with new words or phrases.
- Consider how you can create the conditions to support their success like creating a quiet, organized environment with age-appropriate board books, toys, or creative supplies.
- Initially, practice may require more teaching, but avoid taking over and doing it for your child.

Step 4. **Support** Your Child's Development and Success

- Use "Show me..." statements and ask them to demonstrate how they can work hard toward a goal. When a child learns a new skill, they are eager to show it off! *"Show me you can tell me what you are feeling."*
- Don't move on quickly if your child shows interest in trying something new. Children often need more time to stick with a challenge or pursue a goal. Be sure to wait long enough for your child to show you they are competent. Your waiting could make all the difference in whether they are able to gain skills over time.
- Recognize effort by using "I notice..." statements like: *"I noticed how you squeezed your pillow like we practiced."*
- On days with extra challenges when you can see your child is scared of new people or situations, offer confidence in your child's ability to face the unfamiliar. In a gentle, non-public way, you can whisper in your child's ear, *"Remember how you enjoyed meeting my friend Susie. Anna is kind too. You might enjoy meeting her today."*
- Actively reflect on how your child is feeling when approaching challenges. You can offer reflections like:
 - *"You seem worried about going into this new store. I'll hold you so that you feel more confident."* Offering comfort when facing new situations can help your child gain a sense of security and face them rather than backing away.
 - You can also offer comfort items to help your child face new challenges. *"Would your bear help you feel better?"*
- Take steps to support your child if they experience separation anxiety. Be certain you are placing your child in the care of someone you trust so that you feel safe leaving your child in that person's care. Give your child a piece of you (blanket, scarf) to have while you're gone. Express your love and explain to them when you will return in terms of activities: *"You'll finish lunch, and then I'll be back!"* Leave without lingering but don't sneak out.

Tip Separation anxiety, though developmentally normal, can be stressful for both parent and child. Take deep breaths and time to calm down after leaving your child in caring hands.

Step 5. Recognize Effort and Quality to Foster Motivation

- Recognize your child's efforts with praise, high fives, and hugs. If your child cried when you had to leave the playground yesterday but seems perfectly content today, notice their newfound comfort. *"I notice you are OK as we leave the playground today. That's very helpful!"*
- Avoid bribes. A bribe is a promise for a behavior, while praise is special attention after the behavior. For example, instead of saying, *"If you go down the slide by yourself, I will give you a sticker"* (which is a bribe), try recognizing the behavior after. *"I see you went down the slide by yourself. Love seeing that!"*
- Recognize small steps along the way. For example, you don't have to wait until your two-year-old is able to sleep through the night to recognize they are doing better at their sleep routine. Remember that your recognition can work as a tool to promote more positive behaviors. Find small ways your child is making an effort and let them know you see them. *"You stayed in your bed. I like seeing that!"*
- Build celebrations into your everyday routines. Promote joy and happiness by laughing, singing, dancing, hugging, and snuggling to appreciate one another.

Recommended Citation: Center for Health and Safety Culture. (2020). *Confidence Summary*. Age 2. Retrieved from <https://www.ParentingMontana.org>.