



## CELEBRATE GESTURE

The Celebrate gesture is a seemingly small everyday gesture that can make a world of difference in a child's life.

When we celebrate a child's achievements and challenges, both big and small, and affirm who they are as individuals, we support the development of their self-identity and remind them of their competence, importance, and lovability. When we acknowledge their birthdays, graduations or everyday accomplishments like completing their homework, meeting new friends or doing chores, we help children build positive self-esteem.

Studies show that an essential ingredient for a child's resilience, particularly in a child who has experienced violence and traumatic stress, is a secure relationship between the child and a caring adult who loves them, believes in them, sees them as special, and celebrates their accomplishments.<sup>1</sup> Supportive and encouraging adults can help them better cope with adversity.

As teachers and influential adults, you can help children celebrate with "put-ups" and "not put-downs." A cheer, a clap, a smile, a kind greeting or a statement that acknowledges them are simple expressions that can heal minds, change minds, and help children thrive.

In this section, we offer ideas to celebrate children by providing affirmation and validation, recognizing their individual and cultural uniqueness, and fostering their self-confidence and self-esteem.

See the [short films](#), inspired by real stories, that celebrate relationships with mentors who helped build self-esteem and confidence.

### **Age-Related Tips**

Every day we have opportunities to celebrate with children of all ages.

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#### **Infants & Toddlers**

All infants and toddlers seek attention, love, and acknowledgment as they develop a sense of identity and self-worth.

- Say their names and respond to them consistently.
- Praise them for their hard work, for sticking with a difficult task, or for helping others.
- Support them when they are frustrated, providing only as much help as needed.
- Encourage them to persevere and don't forget to praise them for making the effort.

With toddlers, support their newfound independence and explorations and be there to make them feel safe and secure. Provide opportunities for trial and error experimentation so they can persevere through difficulty.

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## **Elementary/Middle School**

Teachers and administrators can help children in this age group celebrate by offering support, encouraging perseverance, and exposing them to new ideas.

### **Support**

- Support elementary and middle school aged children and teach them how to understand and evaluate outcomes.
- Support children by creating a nurturing environment that fosters a sense of control and efficacy.

### **Encourage Perseverance**

- Encourage trial and error problem-solving skills to teach them how to persevere and celebrate the process.
- Encourage them to explore cultural traditions and identify sources of cultural pride.

### **Provide Opportunities**

- Encourage children to explore and try new things and teach them about being helpful or kind to others.
- Engage them in open-ended free play and thinking.

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## **Teens**

You can support teens by helping them build a sense of personal identity around their likes, dislikes, hopes, and values.

- Encourage them to take part in activities they enjoy and that you can do together, such as video games, art projects, shooting hoops, etc.
- Invite them to talk about their successes and challenges and teach them the value of the process and not just the final achievement.
- Guide them in exploring cultural traditions and sources of cultural pride.

## **Environment-Related Tips**

### **At school**

Teachers and school administrators can help celebrate children by building confidence, recognizing their efforts, and encouraging positive interactions between children and their peers or teachers.

#### **Build Confidence**

- Engage children in open-ended, free play or activities that build their confidence.
- Point out their talents and strengths and offer more opportunities to build on these skills.
- Publically recognize and praise children when they are doing things right. When you need to re-direct their behavior, do so privately and calmly.

#### **Provide Recognition**

- Greet children by name and offer rounds of applause or high fives as encouragement.
- Take children's concerns seriously and offer validating statements.
- Tell them that you like them and why you think they're special.



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## **Encourage Positive Thinking**

- Establish a climate of respect that supports “put ups, not put downs.”
  - Ensure your interactions with students are affirming, encouraging, and validating.
  - Identify and reinforce a child’s areas of strength and give positive reinforcement when they show skills such as perseverance and focus.
  - When children have setbacks or frustrations, praise their efforts and help them figure out next steps.
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## **In the Community**

Adults in the community can help children celebrate in the same way that teachers and caregivers do by offering them recognition and encouragement and fostering positive thinking.

- Greet children by name and tell them what you like about them.
  - Establish a climate of respect that supports “put ups, not put downs.”
  - Identify and support children’s strengths and unique talents by engaging them in activities they enjoy.
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## **In Health Care Settings**

Children may have difficulty communicating and may experience fear or uncertainty in health care settings.

- Recognize children you know and greet them by name.
  - Take children’s concerns seriously and offer validating statements.
  - Make them feel important and with older children include them in any treatment planning.
  - Praise them for being brave after a difficult procedure.
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## **At Home**

At home, family and caregivers can create a safe space for children to grow and learn.

### **Let Them Know They Are Special**

- Be spontaneous and affectionate. A simple hug or a note in your child’s book bag with messages like “I think you’re terrific!” can go a long way!
- Make time for you and your child to do things they enjoy, without distractions like phone calls.
- Create a wall of fame in your house. Every child is good at something. Discover it, encourage it, and display it.

### **Build Responsibility**

- Give children age-appropriate responsibilities that contribute to the household, like helping to prepare a meal, taking the trash out, tending to a pet, or cleaning up after themselves. When they complete the tasks, tell them you appreciate their hard work.
- Remember to notice and praise even the small things children do, such as being helpful or kind.
- Provide positive reinforcement and tell them you’re proud of them when you see they’re putting effort towards or trying something they previously failed.



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## **Why It Works**

As children develop, their early emotional experiences become embedded in the architecture of their brains. A child's emotional health is closely tied to the social and emotional characteristics of the environments in which they live.<sup>2</sup>

Traumatic events like violence, crime, and abuse can change how children see the world and themselves. And to celebrate themselves or with others may be the furthest from their minds.

You can make a difference! One of the essential factors in building resilience to adversity in children is a secure relationship between a child and a caring adult who loves them, believes in them, sees them as special, and celebrates their accomplishments.<sup>1</sup>

The Celebrate gesture is essential to teaching children who have witnessed violence and experienced traumatic stress that they are lovable, competent, and important.<sup>3</sup> There are many ways to celebrate children as outlined in the previous section – by addressing them by name, recognizing their strengths and talents, building respect and perseverance, and fostering positive thinking and self-confidence.

Every time you celebrate a child is an opportunity to teach them the social and emotional skills they need to heal. The examples below show how important a Celebrate gesture can be:

- Greeting and acknowledging children recognizes them and shows them that they matter.
- Praising and celebrating children when they carry out something difficult shows them that no matter how stressful things may become, perseverance is important.
- Reinforcing “put-up” and not “put down” attitudes encourages positive thinking and can help them learn skills for managing their emotions.
- Partnering with them to identify and engage in activities they enjoy will help them develop self-esteem and personal skills. This can lead to higher achievement, improved social relationships, and overall happiness.<sup>4</sup>
- Honoring and supporting a child's positive cultural and ethnic identity can help children appreciate cultural differences and similarities which will contribute to positive youth development.<sup>5</sup>

## **References**

<sup>1</sup> The National Child Traumatic Stress Network. (2014). Children and Domestic Violence – How Does Domestic Violence Affect Children? Retrieved from:

[http://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/childrenanddv\\_factsheet\\_1.pdf](http://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/childrenanddv_factsheet_1.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. (2005/2014). Excessive Stress Disrupts the Architecture of the Developing Brain: Working Paper 3. Updated Edition.

<http://developingchild.harvard.edu/>.



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<sup>3</sup> Groves, B.M. (2002). Children who see too much: Lessons from the Child Witness to Violence Project. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

<sup>4</sup> Luthar, S.S., Cicchetti, D., & Becker, B. (2000). Research on resilience: Response to commentaries. Child Development, 71(3), 573-575.

<sup>5</sup> Culture Influences (n.d.) Retrieved from <http://youth.gov/youth-topics/how-culture-influences-positive-youth-development>.

[Activate Your Community](#)

[Taking Care of Yourself](#)