



Gymnastics Builds Self-Esteem

The purpose of this article is to help link self esteem with gymnastics. When first writing this article, I tried to make the points about self-esteem without pulling in my personal experiences as a child or my GymClub, Kids First Sports Center. However, this topic is so deeply personal to me that attempts to depersonalize it fell short so I decided to go ahead with the first version. Please feel free to borrow the concepts and language for use in your club.

There is little doubt in my mind, Kids First exists today because of my own personal experience with sports, in particular, gymnastics. As an elementary student, I was socially sheltered, as my mom did not drive or get out much and my dad was busy running his business. We virtually never traveled and a trip to a restaurant was a once a year occurrence. I lacked confidence in myself and was awkward in new situations and, therefore, avoided them as well as other risks.

Gymnastics altered my perception of myself and absolutely changed the course of my life. I grew comfortable with the challenge of trying to teach my body to learn various skills. I gradually learned to welcome other challenges that became synonymous with achievement, causing perseverance to become a simple fact of life: all because of gymnastics.

I remember well my first teaching job as a junior at The University of Cincinnati, instructing tumbling at Mary Ann Pearman's School of Dance in Fort Thomas, Kentucky. I fell in love with helping kids receive the same benefits from gymnastics that I did. To this day, professionally, I define myself first and foremost as a teacher, even though I now spend my time teaching adults in a leadership capacity as well as at Boot Camp. (I believe that the principles underlying teaching and leadership are one and the same.)

Why is skillful gymnastics instruction so beneficial for young children? I have thought about this for decades and have come to some firm conclusions. Young human beings live in a largely physical world and play is mostly physical as is learning. It is a huge event in the life of a child when s/he learns to walk, run, jump or skip—far more important to a person's psychological makeup than learning to conjugate a verb or solve for X. To this day, I remember the feelings of frustration and inadequacy while trying to learn to skip—gymnastics certainly cured that!

Good, bad, right or wrong, children form perceptions of their overall capabilities based on how well they stack up physically with their peers. To a 3 year old, it is far more important to be able to keep up on the playground than it is to count to 25. Feeling competent physically leads to a general belief, "I am capable," which is a foundational component of a healthy self-esteem. Other components of self-esteem are: "I am lovable," "I belong," "I can contribute," "I am in control of myself," all of which are enhanced through skillful gymnastics instruction. Few would argue that a healthy self-esteem is a requisite for inner peace and happiness and a worthy goal for us all, which brings us full circle to the title and central focus of this article, "gymnastics builds self-esteem."

Hopefully you can help build self-esteem in your students and the gymnastics business will continue to grow!

Make it a great month!

Jeff Metzger
USA Gymnastics Business Development Partner
President, GymClub Owners Boot Camp
President, Kids First Sports Center



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