

The Perfect Gift

Written by Andrea & Scott Ralls
Founders/Owners/Directors of Southwoods Camp
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During this special time of the year, we are all thinking about gifts - those that we have received and those that we have or will be giving. We spend weeks agonizing over and trying to find the “perfect” gift for those we love. And, for most of us, it is our children we hope to please the most with the gifts we provide. At Southwoods we believe that one of the most “perfect” gifts you can give your child is the gift of positive **self-esteem**. The following are some proven strategies we hope help in your continued efforts to provide this important gift.

Give your child unconditional love. Children flourish when they know that no matter what they do or who they are, you will love them. This unconditional love frees them to grow and take safe risks. But it is also important to note that loving a child unconditionally does not mean we do not correct them. It means we provide them with clear guidelines and expectations about their behavior all the while helping them learn how to make good choices and achieve those expectations. Teaching and providing healthy limits, clearly and consistently gives children a safe structure in which they can excel.

Support safe risks and allow for a child to make some mistakes. It is important for a child to make mistakes and see that they can survive. Encountering and dealing with challenges causes children to grow and learn new skills that will help them deal with and not be afraid to try new things in the future. A healthy balance of helping and protecting children mixed with their need to try new things will foster an environment where **self-esteem** can grow.

Pay attention and listen well. We must find time everyday where children have our undivided attention. This time together sends a very clear message to a child that we think they are important. One of the most important things we can do during our time together is listen. Truly listen, without always giving advice, opinions or solutions to the issues or problems being shared. Letting a child talk, allows them to express emotions and become comfortable sharing thoughts and feelings.

Celebrate the positive and provide encouragement. When we take the time to acknowledge the good things our children are doing, no matter how big or small, it makes an impact. Please be sure to be very specific in your praise. This allows the child to understand exactly what he has done well and what has made us proud, while also showing that we are really engaged and aware of what is going on in his life. The benefit here is that this will help children continue to try hard and feel good in the effort, whether they are successful or not.

At Southwoods, one of our most important tasks is to make each child feel good about themselves. We support and provide our staff with information throughout the year on how to do this well. Many people think camp is about soccer, or tennis or any of the 65 different activities we offer. The fact is, all of these activities are really just tools we use to provide the really important things a child needs to grow and be successful, like **self-esteem**. In the end, our goal is that each child leaves Southwoods, feeling more empowered and confident about their ability to accomplish and overcome any challenge they may meet.

May all children receive this “perfect” gift...

Suggested reading:

Bringing Up Kids Without Tearing Them Down - By Dr. Kevin Leman
Wonderful Ways to Love A Child - By Judy Ford