

Teaching our children to love themselves

 By [Shan Raddiffe](#)

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Writer, entrepreneur and mother, Anita Telle believes the greatest lesson we can teach our children is how to accept and love themselves, and has written a few books to help us do so.



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Growing up in Norway, with its culture of storytelling, she was inspired by the natural beauty which surrounded her. Her mother a writer, Telle's imagination was further encouraged by her father.

Telle's own son was born with a cleft palate and lip. "As he was growing older, he was a little different with his scars and speech issues, so I said to myself, 'What can I do as a mom to help my son?', and out of the blue, the story 'A Little Different All Perfect' came to be my first book. It just appeared in my head one day, with images and all, so it was pretty easy to put it on paper."

'A Little Different All Perfect' went on to win the Children's Books category of the 2013 San Francisco Book Festival. "From then on, I wrote two more children's books, and one more book for parents and teens about solutions to bullying, and how my son was raised believing in himself," Telle said.

"What is close to my heart is doing what I can to make this world a better place, and if my stories can change one child's life, then I have made a difference. My children's books all deal with social issues such as being different, but remembering we are all perfect just the way we are; teaching our children about kindness and always having time for a smile and a loving word for someone."

Gnomy and the Boo Boo Bears

Her books are not the only thing inspired by her son. With his condition, he suffered many ear infections, which left him in pain, explains Telle. One of the few things that helped soothe him was the moist heat from a sock filled with rice.

"I thought to myself, what if, instead of using a sock, I make a booboo-bear - a cute, little bear with a personality and charm? I contacted local woman to make the bears, fill them with organic rice, a little magic and then I 'give them life' - by

personally drawing on their face, giving them a name and a story.

"I made a choice to give all the Boo Boo Bears their own interests and personality - that way the child can have a bear friend that has the same interests as them and they relate to each other.

"My goal is to one day have the [Boo Boo Bears and Gnomy](#) have their own TV show where they teach acceptance, kindness and joy to children worldwide. We must start sharing human kindness, acceptance and love across the world, educating our children and making them understand that we have so much more in common than what we think. Now I just have to find someone willing to help me get my TV program happening...!"

Learning to love yourself

I chatted to Telle further about the importance of building a child's self-esteem and how we can go about teaching them how to love themselves.

■ ***Why do you feel it is so important for children to accept themselves before going out to change the world?***

Self-love, self-esteem and feeling good about yourself are so important to teach your child. You want your child to feel confident; having self-esteem acknowledges equality, it gives them humility, it provides ways for them to feel good about themselves, and approve of themselves. This gives them realistic and positive opinions of themselves.

I sometimes hear that teaching your child self-esteem turns them into narcissistic little brats. This is so far from the truth. A child with narcissistic tendencies is arrogant, manipulative, needs constant attention and likes to dominate others. So again, not true. When you teach a child to accept themselves and respect others, you have a child more able to give to others because they know who they are. A child with low personal value has a hard time in life. Changing children's mindsets and teaching them how amazingly perfect they all are - no matter what colour, size or religion - is such an important part of my work. So go out there, and teach your children how truly unique and amazing they really are!



Anita Telle

■ ***How can we start instilling this awareness at an educational level?***

This is hard, because people do not like change, they prefer status quo. To accomplish this awareness, we must have a shift in the mindset of many parents, teachers, principals, yes... all the way to our governments.

Parents are often uncomfortable bringing up issues at school meetings - they don't want to stand out or come across as if they are complaining, therefore it is easier to just go along with things.

It reminds me of the story of the mom who, every Christmas, would cut the end of the ham off before she put it in the oven. Her daughter asked her one day why she did it, her answer was: "I don't know, Grandma always did." The daughter then called her grandma and asked her why she did it, and she said: "I could not fit it in my baking dish unless I cut it off."

The morale of the story is that even though things have always been done one way, it does not make it right. Ask questions, suggest changes, instill in your child the knowledge that it is okay to have their own opinion, to question things, to come to their own conclusions. Starting at home is definitely the beginning.

■ ***How can we better equip teachers to deal with intolerance and bullying in schools?***

One thing that's a must is systems:

- a clear understanding of the school's written policies, follow through on policies;
- teaching the teachers how to spot a child that is being bullied - making sure they know what warning signs to look for;

- making sure everyone understands the school's code of conduct;
- open communication with parents, getting parents involved in the process;
- making sure there is time set aside every week to talk openly in class about the importance of acceptance;
- teaching the children that are “bystanders” about the amazing power they have - if bystanders spoke up it would cut bullying with almost 50%;
- do a weekly exercise where you divide the class up in teams, and give them a problem to solve, (in regards to particular bullying situations);
- create poem or art projects that deal with bullying, and reinforce a strong message that bullying is wrong.

■ **What message do you have for youth who feel like they don't fit in?**

First and foremost, there isn't anyone in the whole world that “fits in with everyone” - we are all born with different personalities and interests. This sounds very obvious, but it is not. Many teens and even adults believe (and also put this enormous pressure on themselves) that they have to change themselves to be liked by others. No....

You are good enough, just the way you are.

So you have different interests, sense of humour, clothing preference, hair colour, whatever... It is fine. It is who you are and who you are growing into becoming. Don't seek approval from others, you are you, and you are awesome.

The person you are comparing yourself to, and want to be like, is most definitely having their own issues, we don't know everyone's story and don't ever be fooled by the cover.

That aside, start with knowing and believing that you are uniquely made, 100% perfect just the way you are.

Secondly, don't hang with someone who's constantly cutting you down, it is not worth it.

Third, know that you are not alone; there are many people just like you. Don't ever think that you are the only one with your particular problem or question.

Fourth, seek out people with the same interest as you, make friends with them. *One* good friend who's always there for you is worth his/her weight in gold.

Fifth, try not to overreact and stress yourself out. Ask yourself, “How will this affect me in five years; will it still be relevant?” If yes, do something about it. If no, let it be.

Sixth, always remember it is totally okay to ask for help - find someone you trust and tell them you need their guidance.

Finally, start every morning with positive self-talk; find five things you are grateful for, write them down, and you will notice a change in your mindset. It's simple but so very effective.

ABOUT SHAN RADCLIFFE

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