

Short Stature Tips

What is short stature?

Short stature is defined as having a height that is shorter than expected for a given age and gender. Growth is measured with a special device called a **stadiometer** (standing measurement) or an **infantometer** (length measurement used for infants and children who are unable to stand). These measurements are recorded on a special form called a **growth chart**. If a child's measurements are below the normal range for his or her age group, they are considered to have short stature. Additional testing may need to be done to determine whether this condition is a normal variant or caused by a medical problem.

What kinds of problems can occur if my child has short stature?

Psychological impact: Children who are shorter than expected for their age may be seen as "different" and may not be accepted by people at a normal height. It is important for parents and family members to help the child with a growth disorder develop **positive self-esteem and self-image**.

Physical impact: Since most buildings are designed for people of "normal" stature, children with short stature may be at a disadvantage when performing everyday tasks. It may be difficult to reach kitchen cupboards, light switches and doorknobs. This may exclude the child from participating in normal activities such as setting the family table, turning off lights prior to going to bed and closing the door behind them. Age appropriate children's clothing and shoes may be difficult to find in smaller sizes.

How can I help my child with short stature build positive self-esteem?

Parents can help build their child's self-esteem by **treating their child age appropriately**; in other words, they should be treated their chronological, "birthday age" rather than their "height age". Allowing the child to behave or engage in play that is inappropriately young can be destructive to normal social and psychological development. Make sure to buy age appropriate clothing for your child, being sensitive to the **peer pressure** to wear trendy clothes in order to fit in with his or her peers. This may be more important to the child who has a physical difference than to his or her peers.

In situations in which it is age appropriate for the child to **be assertive and speak up** for him or herself, encourage the child to do so. It may be helpful

to **role-play** different situations such as being handed a kiddy menu in a restaurant, or responding to an adult who makes a comment about how short the child is in a tone of voice usually reserved for a much younger child or an infant.

Have your child **emphasize his success**, especially those that don't involve height, and have them make a list of things that they enjoy doing or do well. Help your child see that small size is not a disadvantage in some activities (soccer, baseball, softball, swimming), and may even be an advantage in others (gymnastics, ballet, and long-distance running)

Also **pay attention to your own attitude** about your child's size. Your child depends on you to be supportive.

How can I help my child with short stature get along with other children?

Earning peer respect at school is a major achievement for children with short stature. One of the goals of a helpful adult should be to help the child earn this respect. This may be academic excellence, public speaking, drama, music, or art.

How can I help my child handle the "BULLY"?

Teasing may be a major challenge throughout your child's school years. You might have your child brainstorm with you a list of ways to "handle the bully". Some of these include: ignoring the bully, befriending the bully, agreeing with the bully and moving on or returning the bully's comment with a snappy comeback. Role playing and practicing the seemingly spontaneous comebacks is very helpful in giving the child confidence to actually perform if they are teased.

Ask your child why they think the bully might be teasing and lead them to giving you the answer that the bully is feeling very insecure and needs to be picking on someone else to make himself feel better inside. Make a rule that absolutely no fighting is allowed since it is quite possible for a shorter child to be physically injured by a larger bully. When all fails, the child should be encouraged to call an adult and report the bully's behavior. This is not seen as tattling or running to the teacher but a method of self-protection when other methods of dealing with the bully have not been successful. Reinforce that the child is using his brain when seeking adult help in situations that are out of his control. Asking for help when needed should be viewed as a positive act and one that takes courage.

How can I help my child with short stature become more independent?
Often, the home and school environment are designed for taller individuals. Setting up step stools, doorknob turners, light switch pullers or anything else that helps the child function independently is a plus. Household rules may need to be adjusted. For example, if there is a rule that there is no standing on counters perhaps that is not the best rule for a child who cannot reach the dishes or glassware, when he needs a glass of water or is assigned the task of setting the family table. Another approach may be to switch the placement of the glassware and the dishes to a place below the sink while items used less frequently by a young child, such as pots and pans could be put in higher cabinets. The guiding principle in every effort is to enable the child to succeed and increase his sense of **self-worth** and **self-confidence**.

Always **be supportive** of your child's difference. If there are family members or close friends who have experienced similar growth patterns, encourage that adult to share positive success stories. This will hopefully show your child that they can become a valued and contributing adult member of society no matter what their final height. Also answer questions as best as you can, and encourage your child to write down questions you can't answer. Let your child ask the questions at the next visit - children feel less helpless if they understand what's going on. Finally, **seek the help of a professional** psychologist, counselor, or clinical social worker if your child is having problems and needs additional help from someone outside the family.

If you have any further question or concerns please call us at (303)783-3883.

Resources available for children with short stature and their families:

Human Growth Foundation
1-800-451-6434
www.hgfound.org

Magic Foundation
1-800-3MAGIC-3
www.magicfoundation.org