

## Ego Mastery

Play affords children the means to acquire representational mastery over themselves, their environment, and others. Through play, children can feel as big, as powerful, and as skillful as their imaginations will allow. They can also feel in control and attain vicarious mastery and power over whomever and whatever they choose. School-age children still need the opportunity to use large muscles in exuberant outdoor play and the freedom to exert their newfound autonomy and initiative. They need space in which to exercise large muscles and to deal with tensions, frustrations, and hostility. Physical skills practiced and mastered in play help to develop a feeling of personal competence, which contributes to a sense of accomplishment and provides status in their peer group.

## Developing a Self-Concept

The term **self-concept** refers to a conscious awareness of self-perceptions, such as one's physical characteristics, abilities, values, self-ideals and expectancy, and idea of self in relation to others. It also includes one's body image, sexuality, and self-esteem. Although primary caregivers continue to exert influence on children's self-evaluation, the opinions of peers and teachers provide valuable input during middle childhood. With the emphasis on skill building and broadened social relationships, children are continually engaged in the process of self-evaluation.

## Body Image

Body image is what children think about their bodies and is influenced, but not solely determined, by significant others. The number of significant others that influences children's perception of themselves increases with age. Children are acutely aware of their own bodies, the bodies of their peers, and those of adults. They are also aware of deviations from the norm. Physical impairments, such as hearing or visual defects, ears that “stick out,” or birthmarks, assume great importance. Increasing awareness of these differences, especially when accompanied by unkind comments and taunts from others, may cause a child to feel inferior and less desirable.