I did some interesting research half a dozen years ago and I think the results would still stand up.

I looked at over 200 children who were chosen for student leadership positions in schools to work out why they were chosen. They had a predictable number of characteristics and qualities in common including: competence, trustworthiness, the ability to make and maintain friendships, and a number of other pro-social skills.

Interestingly, one characteristic most young leaders shared was the notion of positive tracking. That is, they looked for the bright side of life and the good in others far more than they looked for the negative.

Positive tracking is wonderful life skill that children can attain.

Positive trackers have their antennae tuned in and constantly looking for:

- Things that go well for them
- Strong points about their own and other people’s character
- The good in even negative situations
- Other people’s successes
- Have the ability to reframe a negative into a positive

Not unsurprisingly, positive trackers are popular as they make others feel good. They are also more confident and appear more confident to others.

Martin Seligman, through his ground breaking work on optimism and pessimism, found that while some children were genetically predisposed to optimism and positive thinking the vast majority simply echoed their parents’ thinking styles. To be exact, Seligman found that boys and girls copied their mother’s positive or negative tracking styles.

Why mothers? Children spend more time around them than they do around fathers is Seligman’s thinking.

Seligman’s research is brilliant news for parents. It shows that we can influence our children’s thinking styles and help them develop positive thinking habits. Anyone with a very positive or very negative mother can attest to the powerful affects that such thinking had on them. The affects can last a lifetime.

That’s why it is important for parents to learn the skills of positive tracking and optimism and apply them judiciously to their parenting, particularly in children’s early years.

There are three ways parents can influence children’s tracking styles:

1. Modelling: Quite simply children reflect what they hear and parents present a style of thinking about the world that children copy. Either the world is full of hope or helplessness. It’s a no-brainer for parents.

2. Reframing: Teach children to reframe negative events more positively. If things are rotten then look at the world through a different frame. Is it a problem or a challenge? Do kids make errors or do they produce more opportunities to learn? Get the picture.

3. Tune their antennae in to the positive: Get their antennae tuned into the good stuff. Acknowledge loss, fear and rejection then help them tune their antennae for the good things that may come their way.

Positivity is a quality that is highly attractive. It is a magnetic quality that attracts good fortune, people and even achievement. It is also something that can be taught as well as caught.

You can find out more about positive tracking in Michael Grose’s *Confidence Program: Creative ways to boost confidence in kids* available at: [www.parentingideas.com.au](http://www.parentingideas.com.au)