



## **SELF-ESTEEM - WHAT IS IT?**

Self-esteem is how a person feels about themselves, what they do, and how they go about it. Someone with positive self-esteem generally approaches things thinking they are a good person who deserves love and support and can succeed in life. Someone with low or negative self-esteem will generally think they are not good at things, don't deserve love or support and that situations will work out badly for them.

### **Children and young people with high self-esteem tend to have the following traits:**

- Have a positive image of themselves.
- Are confident (this is not the same as being arrogant).
- Able to make friends easily and are not anxious with new people.
- Can play or be in groups as comfortably as being on their own.
- Will try and solve problems on their own, but if not able to ask for help.
- Are proud of their achievements.
- Can admit mistakes and learn from them.
- Will try new things and adapt to change.

### **Children with low self-esteem:**

- Have a negative image of themselves and may feel bad, ugly, unlikeable or stupid.
- Lack confidence.
- Find it hard to make and keep friendships and may feel they are victimised by others.
- Tend to avoid new things and find change hard.
- Can't deal well with failure.
- Tend to put themselves down and might say things like, "I'm stupid" or "I can't do that" (sometimes before they have tried).
- Are not proud of what they achieve and always think they could have done better.
- Are constantly comparing themselves to their peers in a negative way.

Most of us will have 'dips' in self-esteem as we go through different stages or challenges in life. Starting a new school, moving to a new house, changes in the family, issues with peers or school, bereavement, not doing as well as hoped for in a test or struggling with school work are some factors that can affect a child's confidence. With support from parents and other adults they usually get through this.

However, some children seem to have low self-esteem from an early age and find it difficult to bounce back. This may be partly down to their personalities; some people naturally have a more negative outlook on life than others. Or they may have had an unsettled time as a baby or toddler due to their own or family health and well-being problems. Other children develop low self-esteem following a difficult separation or divorce, bereavement, being bullied or abused, or expectation to achieve good grades, look a certain way, and be successful or popular.

Children and young people with low self-esteem are more at risk of developing anxiety, depression, and self-harm and mental health problems as they grow up. They will often find the ups and downs of life in general harder to get through.

Parents and carers can try and boost their children's confidence in a number of ways, which in turn will bolster self-esteem and resilience.

### **SELF – ESTEEM - WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?**

- Show them lots of love and be positive about them as a person – tell them what makes them special and important to you.
- Set an example of positive attitude yourself when faced with challenges, even the smallest ones. Rather than, 'I'm so clumsy. I'm constantly spilling things,' try, 'Whoops. I'll get a cloth and clean this up.'
- Encourage them to try new challenges themselves and celebrate them for it. Phrases like, 'Well done, that was hard, and you managed it,' are good. Make the steps small at first, then increase the challenges.
- Give praise for their successes, and don't focus on areas where they have not done so well.
- Give compliments freely. This is not a matter of going overboard but being truthful and honest.
- Reassure them it's OK to make mistakes and that it's all part of growing up. If you make a mistake, admit it and say sorry to show them getting it wrong is not the end of the world and happens to everyone. Every mistake is a learning experience after all.
- If something goes wrong or not as well as expected, avoid solely focusing on the outcome and instead encourage them to think what they may do differently if faced with a similar situation; problem solving is good.
- Avoid being too critical or putting them down.
- Separate the deed from the doer, focus on specific praise. If you are unhappy, disappointed or angry, or indeed happy and proud with their behaviour, be specific and tell them why they make you feel that way. Rather than, 'You were a bad boy/girl today,' consider, 'When you didn't share the toys with your brother, I was disappointed because there are plenty to go around,' whilst still making it clear you love them. Equally, 'I was pleased with you for sharing the toys with your brother,' is far more specific than, 'You were a good boy/girl.'
- Acknowledge their feelings' help them express their feelings in words. For example, encourage them to say, 'I'm upset because...' or 'I feel happy when...'
- Use creativity to help the child express themselves – art, drama, music, dance.
- Helping others can make us feel good inside. That feeling usually translates into feeling proud of oneself.
- Encourage children discover and develop their talents, through clubs, groups and activities. Finding something they are good at provides a huge boost to their feeling of self-worth. Help them find a passion they can cultivate so it balances out things they find a challenge.
- Importantly, if a child feels that his or her family is working together as a team, that people care about one another, treat each other respectfully and help each other out with responsibilities, then a child is more likely to feel a sense of security and belonging. He or she will feel an overall sense of well-being, loving others and will be more likely to feel good about themselves.

It can be helpful to write down what makes you think why your child has low self-esteem, and anything you think might be causing it to help you start putting things in place. Whilst you cannot walk in your child's shoes and their experience is unique, it may be useful to think back to what dented your own self-esteem. How did you feel? What was, or could have been useful at the time to help you?

You can also help your child by making sure your child's school is aware they are struggling with self-esteem and ask what support is available.