



Extension FactSheet

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4-H Youth Development, 2120 Fyffe Road, Columbus, Ohio 43210



Building Self-Esteem with Youth

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Developing positive self-esteem in children is an important responsibility for all adults who interact with them. When children feel good about themselves, they are better able to resist negative influences in their lives. Positive self-esteem enables children to grow up and be happy, responsible, and contributing adults.

What Is Self-Esteem?

Self-esteem is the value we place on what we believe to be true about ourselves; how we feel about ourselves; and/or an emotion we hold true about ourselves.

People with high self-esteem consider themselves worthy, and view themselves as equal to others. They recognize their limitations, expect to grow and improve, and do not pretend to be perfect.

Those low in self-esteem generally experience self-rejection, self-dissatisfaction, self-contempt, and self-disparagement. Low self-esteem can be a major factor in mental health problems, suicide, alcohol and drug abuse, violence, and many other problems.

Characteristics of a person with high or positive self-esteem ...

1. Believes strongly in certain principles and values.
2. Is capable of acting in his/her own best judgment.
3. Has fewer health problems.
4. Genuinely enjoys him/herself and participates in a wide variety of activities.
5. Feels equal to others as a person.
6. Resists efforts of peers to dominate or sway them.
7. Feels confident in the ability to deal with challenging situations, despite failures and setbacks.
8. Is sensitive to the needs of others; cares about others.
9. Is more flexible and adaptable in changing situations.
10. Is happy, energetic, enthusiastic, and enjoys life.

Characteristics of a person with low or negative self-esteem ...

1. Is overly sensitive to criticism, and afraid to make a mistake.
2. Is overly critical of others and self.
3. Blames others.
4. Feels persecuted.
5. Has a fear of competition and/or is reluctant to try new things.
6. Is over-responsive to praise.
7. Is shy, timid, or withdrawn.
8. Is uncertain of own opinions and values.
9. May be jealous or possessive.
10. Has difficulty entering into loving relationships.

Building Blocks to Self-Esteem

Trust

Trust is the basis of all human relationships. A person who has a well-developed sense of trust is able to take risks involved in learning to become a happy, successful person. In order for an individual to develop trust in others, he/she must have a series of positive encounters with the people who share his/her world.

Self

Children begin to mold their self-images early in life. By creating environments in which children can feel secure about themselves and develop their strengths, adults can help children have those positive experiences.

Belonging

Belonging is the feeling of being accepted by others. Individuals gain security when they feel like they belong to a group. Those feelings of security and acceptance help nurture self-esteem.

Purpose

Purpose is an important part of one's self-esteem development. Every individual needs to have a feeling of purpose or a mission in life.

Success

The statement, “success breeds success,” is true in the development of healthy self-esteem in people. By identifying a problem or goal, by developing a plan of action, and by accomplishing an objective, children develop problem-solving skills, as well as a sense of pride. This in turn starts an interesting chain of events for children, including:

1. Self-concept becomes more positive.
2. Become motivated to set new goals or tackle new problems.
3. Begin to use resources more effectively.
4. Views adults as resources and sources of support.
5. Becomes more proficient at solving problems and achieving goals.
6. Sense of personal competence grows, and he or she is motivated to start the process over again.

By providing learning opportunities and experiences throughout the building stages, adults can have a profound and positive influence on a child's self-esteem. In the words of Jack Canfield, “Success will only result if the adult leader is a caring, capable, and lovable individual that can communicate a feeling of importance and self-worth to others. A positive self-esteem is extremely important to the individual. And teaching self-esteem, after all, is simply a way to help others overcome their negative ideas about themselves and to discover their unique potentials.”

Strategies for Building Children's Self-Esteem

One of the best ways to foster children's self-esteem is to get them to feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for their experiences. Help children develop a personal and vested interest in their own activities by: 1) giving them the freedom to make mistakes; 2) finding ways for them to contribute to their learning experience; and 3) giving them choices.

You can help youth develop positive self-esteem by:

Encouraging members to take risks:

- sign up for a new project
- accept a club office
- lead the 4-H pledge
- present a demonstration

Providing a wide variety of opportunities:

- involvement on committees
- participation in community service
- exploring different projects

Giving each member personal attention:

- listening
- encouraging
- recognizing member’s efforts and accomplishments

Volunteer leaders can have a profound effect on children’s positive self-esteem development. Children need positive, caring adult leaders that communicate a feeling of self-worth. Mahatma

Gandhi once said that people “often become what they believe themselves to be. If I believe I cannot do something, it makes me incapable of doing it. But when I believe I can, then I acquire the ability to do it even if I didn’t have it at the beginning.” Adult leaders help youth by providing opportunities to be involved and achieve.

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