

## SELF-ESTEEM IN YOUNG PEOPLE

### A TWO PAGE REPAIR AND MAINTENANCE MANUAL

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One of the best gifts we can give to any child is a strong sense of his or her value and worth in society – in other words a strong sense of **self-esteem**. By our own behaviour as adults we can help a child to develop healthy self-esteem (or contribute to the child's loss of self-esteem).

There are 3 pathways to self-esteem (*the 3 A's of Self Esteem*):

- AFFILIATION** - a sense of belonging, of being loveable (healthy)
- ACHIEVEMENT** - a sense of being capable, competent (healthy)
- AUTHORITY** - a sense of being powerful (unhealthy)

Children who grow up feeling a strong sense of **affiliation** (of being loveable, belonging) and a strong sense of **achievement** (of being capable, competent) will inevitably develop robust, healthy self-esteem. They will not need a sense of authority to give an unhealthy, false sense of self-esteem. They will grow up with appropriate and effective personal and social skills.

Children who grow up consistently deprived of experiences which make them feel loveable or capable will discover and develop behaviours which give them a sense of **authority** (power over other people) to compensate for the absence of affiliation and achievement. (How often have you felt powerless when your child acts up in public, or when you are on the phone?) These behaviours are unattractive and conceal a poor sense of self-worth. They give rise to a child with inappropriate and ineffective personal and social skills. Such a child will consistently demonstrate many of the following behaviours (called **oppositional-defiant disorder**):

- temper tantrums
- arguing with adults
- active defiance and resistance
- deliberately annoying others
- blaming others for their own actions
- becoming easily annoyed
- showing anger and resentment
- showing spitefulness and vindictiveness

Of course, all children will display these behaviours from time to time, but the child with poor self-esteem will have a consistent pattern of such behaviour lasting at least 6 months.

So one of the best and most enduring gifts we can give young people is to bring them up with a strong sense of being **loveable** and a strong sense of being **capable**, both of which will contribute to healthy **self-esteem**. Here are some tips on how to achieve this.

### SKILLS FOR PROMOTING A CHILD'S SENSE OF BEING LOVEABLE (APPRECIATION)

#### 1. Pay constant attention to your child by:

- \* making frequent comments on how well they are doing, when they are behaving well (You OK?)
- \* giving each one "special time" alone with you (just the two of you) each day to do something they enjoy – a game, a chat, a bedtime story, whatever
- \* talking to them as much as possible about what you yourself are doing
- \* ignoring unacceptable behaviour if it is minor

## **2. Listen carefully to what your child wants to tell you.**

- \* Ask questions to encourage further expression (How? Why? What? Where? When?....)
- \* Know when to keep quiet or move closer so that your child can say more
- \* Accept that your child will want to express feelings, especially anger or frustration
- \* Do not belittle or judge your child's feelings or try to jolly them out of a mood

## **3. Let your child know they are OK**

- \* Label the act, not the child ("that was a bad thing to do" instead of "you are naughty")
- \* Give specific and prompt feedback, both good and bad, on what they are doing
- \* Keep your own emotions in proportion (dimmer knob rather than on/off switch)
- \* Help your child move from one activity to another by giving advanced warning
- \* Give "thank you" messages – we all love being genuinely appreciated
- \* Apologise when your own actions are out of line (none of us is perfect!)

## **SKILLS FOR PROMOTING A CHILD'S SENSE OF BEING CAPABLE (EMPOWERMENT)**

- \* Develop predictable routines in which each child knows their part.
- \* Be a model of the behaviours you want your child to display (walk the talk!).
- \* Teach your child new skills whenever they express interest.
- \* Have progressive and realistic expectations.
- \* Give your child choices – this is especially effective in "special time".
- \* Let your child take roles they see you taking – children love to help.
- \* Praise, reward and thank your child's effort to do things, even if they don't succeed.
- \* Encourage independent problem solving
- \* Make sure the consequences of your child's actions are appropriate.
- \* Let your child learn natural consequences (the forces of nature!)
- \* Let your child learn logical consequences (what you say goes!)
  - Ask once, and then insist
  - Ensure you deliver what you promise – no empty threats
  - Finish what you start – don't refer your child to someone else ("just wait 'till I tell your father" or "I'll have to ring your mother".)
  - Use time out or other sanctions as a last resort

## **HOW YOU PRODUCE GOOD OR BAD BEHAVIOUR IN YOUR CHILD**

- If you acknowledge and praise good behaviour this will lead to **more good behaviour**
- If you consistently ignore bad behaviour this will lead to **less bad behaviour**
- If you overlook good behaviour this will lead to less good behaviour
- If you always respond to bad behaviour this will lead to more bad behaviour

In other words a child learns to increase any behaviour which gets a response (attention) from you, even if the response seems to be negative, unpleasant and punitive in your eyes.

**REMEMBER - THE ONLY BEHAVIOUR YOU CAN CHANGE IS YOUR OWN.**  
***Start with only one or two of these tips and gradually increase you repertoire of skills.***  
By the way, all this works for adults too.

**GOOD LUCK**