



# family focus

## I. YOUR CHILD'S SELF-ESTEEM---ITS IMPORTANCE ITS ASSESSMENT

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Like most parents we want to help our children achieve the goals and dreams which we have for them...and which they have for themselves. Over the years a considerable amount of evidence has been collected to support the belief that if a child has high self-esteem his chances of attaining his goals in life are greatly increased. Let's consider more closely, then, the *whys* and *hows* of self-esteem...*why* it is so important and *how* as parents we can assess our children's feelings about themselves.

### Exactly what is self-esteem? Is it really so important?

In simple words, self-esteem is composed of the thoughts, the feelings, the ideas that a person has about himself. It is his overall judgment of himself. It is how much he likes, accepts and respects himself.

In one way or another most of the things a child or an adult does is directly related to his feelings about himself. The friends he chooses, how he relates to others, the type of person he marries, his creativity, his achievement, his basic personality all are affected at one time or another by his concept of himself. In other words, it could be said that strong self-esteem is not only the foundation of sound mental health but probably is the key ingredient in charting the course for a successful and happy life. As such the building of a good self image in our children probably constitutes one of...if not the greatest...challenge of parenthood.

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### Self-esteem is learned It can be changed

We are not born with high or low self-esteem. Instead, our feelings about ourselves are learned beginning at birth and continue over our lifetime. Experiences in the highly formative first years of life form the basic foundation of those feelings. They are then constantly revised upward or downward throughout life by the results of each additional experience or undertaking.

High self-esteem is possible for any person! It is not linked to a family's wealth, education, social class, having mom at home, or to dad's occupation, but instead to the *quality* of the relationship that exists between a person and those who are significant in his life. For a very young child a sense of worth is nurtured to a large extent by the people closely involved in his care...mom, dad, grandparents, or people providing day care. As he grows older the school joins these persons in influencing a child's feelings about himself. "Outside world" influences continue to become more and more numerous as a child matures.

### How Can I Tell Whether My Child Feels Good About Himself?

Answering this frequently asked question is not a simple task. However, it's well worth our time. First, it permits us as parents to take a good look at and better understand the results of the child rearing techniques that we have been using in the past. Secondly...and of even greater importance...it can be a valuable tool for planning future experiences with our children.

Careful observation will prove one of the most useful techniques in making such an evaluation. By gathering observations from the adults significant in our child's life a reasonably accurate picture of his self image should emerge. Since a child's actions frequently match or reflect his self image, the behaviors listed below may prove helpful in assessing how your child feels about himself.

#### SOME CHARACTERISTIC BEHAVIORS OF 4-5 YEAR OLDS WITH HIGH AND LOW SELF-ESTEEM

##### High self-esteem

- Makes friends with other children easily.
- Shows enthusiasm for new activities.
- Is cooperative and can usually follow reasonable rules.
- Largely responsible for control of own actions.
- Is independent, self-assured.
- Is creative, imaginative and has ideas of his own.
- Is happy, energetic; talks freely.
- Displays achievement consistent with ability.

##### Low self-esteem

- May be reluctant to enter new situations or try new activities.
- May react with signs of frustration such as anger or tears.
- May withdraw or become overly aggressive to parents or other children.
- May do most things alone or cling to one friend.
- May be possessive of objects and make excessive demands on adult's time.
- Behavior does not suggest he is a happy child.
- May be reluctant to enter into activities that involve close personal contact.

#### References and Recommended Readings (\*available in paperback editions)

- Briggs, Dorothy Corkille, Your Child's Self-Esteem, Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1970.\*
- Brazelton, T. Berry, Toddlers and Parents, New York, New York: Delacorte Press, 1974.
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