

By:  
Joan Witter  
Program Leader  
Contact:  
Jeanne Brown  
Human Development Specialist  
Extension Home Economics Program

# YOUR CHILD'S SELF ESTEEM

## ... Its Importance, Its Assessment

*Like most parents, we want to help our children achieve the goals and dreams we have for them... and they have for themselves. Evidence clearly suggests that if a child has high self-esteem, his/her chances of attaining his/her 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 feeling about themselves.*

### Exactly What is Self-Esteem? Is it Really So Important?

In simple words, self-esteem refers to the feelings that a person has about himself or herself. It is how much an individual likes, admires and values himself or herself.

In one way or another, most of the things a child or an adult does is directly related to his/her feelings about himself or herself. The friends he/she chooses, how he/she relates to others, the type of person he/she marries, his/her creativity, achievement, and basic personality are all affected at one time or another by feelings of self worth.

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 high self-esteem in our children probably constitutes one of the greatest challenges of parenthood.

### 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 continuing 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 by the positive or negative appraisals the child receives from others, particularly from those persons who are truly important.

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/her life. For a very young child, a sense of worth is nurtured to a large extent by the people closely involved in his/her care—mom, dad, grandparents, or people providing day care. As he/she grows older, the school joins these persons in influencing a child's feelings about himself or herself. Influences from outside of the family become more and more numerous as a child matures.

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

This frequently asked question is not easy to answer. However, it's well worth your time to try. It helps you take a good look at, and better understand, the results of the child rearing techniques you have been using. It can also be a valuable tool for planning future experiences with your children.

Careful observation is one of the most useful techniques in making such an evaluation. By gathering observations from the adults significant in your child's life (e.g., spouse or other parent, grandparent, teacher) a reasonably accurate picture of your child's self should emerge. Since a child's actions frequently match or reflect his/her image, the behaviors listed below may help assess how your child feels about himself or herself.

## Some Characteristic Behaviors of Children with 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/her own.
- Is happy, energetic; talks freely.
- Displays achievement consistent with ability.

## Remarks Children Might Make about Themselves if Their Self-Esteem is Low

- I can't do anything well.
- I can't do things as well as others.
- I don't want to try that. I know I'd do it wrong.
- I know I couldn't do it.
- I know I'd fail.
- I don't like myself.
- I wish I were someone else.
- I don't like to try new things or go to new places.

## References and Recommended Readings (paperback editions)

Briggs, Dorothy Corkille. *Your Child's Self-Esteem*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1970.

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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work in agriculture and home economics, acts of May 8, and June 30, 1914. In cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. W.J. Moline, Director, Cooperative Extension Service, Michigan State University, E. Lansing, MI 48824.

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