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Family Focus Your Child's Self Esteem...Its Importance, Its Assessment Michigan State University Cooperative Extension Service Joan Witter 1986 2 pages

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Home and Family Series E-1020



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

Joan Witter, Extension Assistant, Family Living Education

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 why& 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

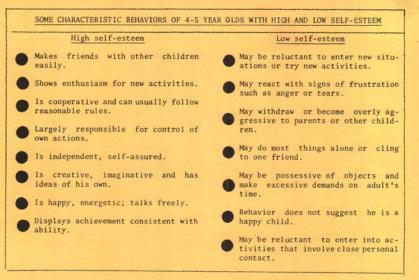
We are not born with high or low selfestem. Instead, our feelings about ourselves are learned beginning at birth and continue over our lifetime. Experiences in the highly formative first years of life form the basic foundation of those feelings. They are then constantly revised upward or downward throughout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



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.\*

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Elkind, David, <u>A Sympathetic Understanding of the Child</u>: Birth to Sixteen, Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1971.\*

Satir, Virginia, <u>Peoplemaking</u>, Palo Alto, California: Science and Behavior Books, Inc., 1972.\*