

Developing Good Self-Esteem in Children – PTA Workshop

Presented by David Stein, School Social Worker

Self-esteem, or self-worth can be looked at as how people regard themselves.

If you most often feel good about yourself and like yourself, then it can be said that you have high self-esteem. The opposite holds as well.

“*Often*” is the operative word as no one always has good self-esteem. Think of situations where you feel better about yourself than others.

The most important element in preventing psychological issues in children is *parental love and affection*. Oppositely, frequent deprivation of parental love and affection greatly affects many areas in child development, and low self-esteem is one of them.

Reflected Appraisals is the earliest way children can begin to form an opinion of themselves. Reflected appraisals initially come from the people the child has the most contact with after birth – *their parents*. With no other way to judge themselves, children begin to form their self-esteem from how their parents act toward them. Later, new criteria are introduced as children are exposed to other adults and peers. School is a good example.

The ultimate goal is for our children, and us, to begin to view our self-esteem from within, with decreased reliance on the environment, although *real* compliments are always welcome!

Some *frequently* used behaviors that may represent confusion in self-esteem are cheating, bribing, bragging, lying, etc.

Parents can offer their children the following things that will help them develop better self-esteem in the future:

~ Help children develop a realistic criteria on how to evaluate themselves vs. reacting to the inevitable criticisms they will encounter.
Ex. If Johnny calls your child stupid, we must help our children not internalize this statement by telling our children the many things they are smart at.

~ Give our children a strong sense of being needed.
Ex. Be expressive when your child does something cute, and makes us laugh. Let your '*warm inner glow feeling*' be experienced by them. Let your child teach you about stuff that they may know more about than us, like computers or a certain TV show. In school, teachers give students jobs like bring a note to the principal, or being a *star of the week*.

~ Help your children develop a true sense of pride within themselves.
Remember, a sense of pride, if it is to be genuinely ego enhancing, must be based on an attribute acquired through some effort.

Ex. It is much more self-esteem building to make a child feel pride in an assignment they finish, a sport they succeed at, than to tell a child that they should be proud that they have the best video game system or even that they are Americans. The video game system comes from the hard earned money their parents earn (the self-esteem here belongs to the parents), and being an American, although a great thing, comes from the luck of the genetic dice and being born in this country.

~ Make homework a self-esteem enhancing experience. A parent may, under the guise of helping their child with homework, actually do it for them, or point out all the mistakes so they hand in a perfect paper. This may seriously undermine the child's development of self-confidence and the ability to do work on their own.

Ex. A parent should be available to help their child, but in ways that stimulate effort and encourage enthusiasm. Parents should help students figure things out rather than figure things out for them.