

63RD CONFERENCE ON EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN

Believing In Achieving

SHERATON FOUR SEASONS | KOURY CONVENTION CENTER | GREENSBORO, NC



Helping Students Build Self-Esteem

Jonathan R. Ricks, MA

Licensed Professional Counselor Associate

Doctoral Student, NCSU





Self-Esteem

- Is learned. No one is born with high and healthy self-esteem.
- Comes from thoughts, feelings and experiences we have had and continue to have throughout life.
- Can be affected by daily circumstances, other people, and most importantly ourselves.
- Can be changed at any age.



Importance of SE

- For many children, both with and without learning disabilities (LD), self-esteem is a powerful predictor of success.
- Social or emotional problems are not the cause but rather the consequence of academic frustration and failure.
- Not all students with an LD like dyslexia have problems with social competence and self-esteem, but many do.
- Daily struggles with the challenges posed by a learning disability can erode the enthusiasm and confidence that make learning, at all ages, fun.



Warning Signs of Low SE

- Exaggerated bragging
- Resorting to numerous attention-getting behaviors such as clowning, acting overly silly, teasing, complaining, exhibiting both verbal and physical aggression
- Being self-critical
- Easily influenced by peers



Warning Signs of Low SE

- Blaming
- Reluctance to learn new things or an avoidance of a challenge
- Over reacting to things such as healthy competition, constructive criticism, or time constraints
- Being unable to make choices or solve problems
- Expressing a narrow range of emotions and feelings
- Demeaning one's own talents
- Very reactive to ups and downs of daily life—failure can be devastating, even on minor projects
- Always apologizing



Research has documented the importance of positive regard from significant others (parents, peers, & teachers) as a critical determinant of self-esteem. Positive regard needs to be unconditional; a child feels loved and accepted regardless of his/her ability or behaviors.



5 Things that Contribute to SE

- Safety
- Selfhood
- Affiliation
- Mission
- Competence



Safety and Security

- All other feelings generally build from this component.
- Means knowing what is expected, being able to depend on others, and comprehending rules & limits.
- They feel emotionally and physically safe.



Research On Families With High SE

- The children experienced the kind of love that expresses respect, concern, and acceptance. They were accepted for their strengths as well as for their limitations and weaknesses. “Love with no strings attached.”
- Parents were significantly less permissive than were parents of children with lower self-esteem. There were clearly defined limits, standards, and expectations, and as a result children felt secure.
- Families functioned with a high degree of democracy. Children were encouraged to present their own ideas and opinions for discussion.



A Sense of Selfhood

- This is having a strong sense of self-knowledge.
- Know who they really are
- Know their interests, their attitudes, their strengths
- Acts as a powerful buffer to stress and trauma



A Sense of Affiliation

- Having a sense of belonging or connectedness
- Feel approved of, respected, and appreciated by others
- Feel recognized and connected
- Family unit is the greatest source of belonging for children



A Sense of Mission

- It is a feeling of purpose, direction, and responsibility.
- Know they have choices and alternatives
- Are goal setters and usually reach their goals because those that they set are realistic and achievable
- Acknowledge their efforts inside their heads instead of waiting for others to pat them on the back



Ways to enhance a child's sense of mission:

- Let children know mistakes are OK
- Share mistakes
- Role-play handling failure



A Sense of Competence

- Having a feeling of being capable and successful in things regarded as important or valuable.
- We need to help them recognize their unique strengths and competencies
- It is important for them to have a feeling of power and control over their lives



Tips for Parents

- Communicate with respect. Don't interrupt or put down your child; answer their questions in a respectful way.
- Find time to give your child your undivided attention. Children feel loved when we spend one-on-one time with them.
- Accept and love your child for who they are. This will allow them to feel more secure in reaching out to others and learning how to solve problems.
- Give your child a chance to contribute, for example, to a conversation, to family chores, or to planning a fun family activity. This communicates your faith in their abilities and gives them a sense of responsibility.



Tips for Parents

- Treat your child's mistakes as learning experiences. When you overreact to mistakes, your child will tend to avoid taking risks rather than to disappoint you. That can also lead them to blaming others for their problems.
- Emphasize your child's strengths, and be specific whenever possible. Help them to really understand and "own" their strengths. When your child feels a sense of accomplishment and pride in their ability to do something, they'll have more confidence to persevere when they face challenges.
- Encourage your child to solve problems and make decisions. Avoid telling them what to do.
- Discipline to teach. Do not discipline your child in a way that intimidates or humiliates them.



Classroom Activities

- Elementary School Example
- Middle School Example
- High School Example