

## WHAT IS SELF ESTEEM?

Self-esteem plays a vital role in almost everything children do. It helps with the development of social skills, including how to make friends and how to keep them, through to success in academic performance. Moreover, children with good self-esteem are better equipped to cope with mistakes, disappointments and failure than those without it. They view these experiences as part of learning, rather than feeling defeated by them.

## HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR CHILD'S SELF ESTEEM

If a child has low (or negative) self-esteem, parents, family, carers, teachers, other supportive adults and friends, all need to encourage him or her to see themselves in a positive way. These children need to feel proud of who they are and what they do. They need to be confident that there is a lot more that they can achieve, and not to give up but to try again when something doesn't go right the first time. When they learn to believe in themselves, they will learn to respect themselves. This in turn will lead to adults and other children respecting them too.

The role of parent and teacher, although different, should be complimentary. Working as a team, they may need to address a child's difficult behaviour - especially if it is causing disruption to the child's life, or indeed other children, consequently damaging a child(s) self-esteem. Teacher's should be aware that if children over-react, as those with ADHD tend to do, they can become easy targets for other children which can lead to bullying. With these children, their impulsivity and inattention can place them in embarrassing or hurtful situations, further damaging their self-esteem. If a child is under-achieving and falling behind peers, or bright and not reaching his or her potential, it is very important to find under which circumstances he or she learns best and when poorly. Whatever the reasons, low-self esteem can result from under-achieving ... or even be the cause.

Many beliefs that an individual holds about themselves, reflect messages they have received from those most close to them over time. If these relationships are strong and there is generally positive feedback, it is more likely that he or she will see themselves as worthwhile and have a stronger self-esteem. So, it is important to remember that if an individual receives mostly negative feedback i.e. often criticised, teased or 'put down', they are more likely to encounter difficulties with their self-esteem. When criticism is necessary it can be done in a constructive way, by addressing the behaviour, rather than criticising the person. Instead of over- sing negative words like - 'no, stop and don't', remember the key is to tell the child what you *want* him or her to do. This is especially important if the child has ADHD as well as low self-esteem, as they may really need to know what the appropriate or

expected behaviour is. Therefore, parents and teachers can often help the child best by redirecting inappropriate behaviour and instructing as to what they should be doing instead.

Encouraging a child to have a sense of belonging, loyalty and responsibility to a larger group will help them contribute and feel connected, which will help prevent any feelings of isolation and worthlessness. This can be applied to both school and activities outside of school.

Positive self-esteem can also help the individual make healthy choices about his or her body e.g. diet and exercise, and his or her mind; If you think you are important, you will be less likely to follow the crowd if your friends are doing something wrong or dangerous. If you have positive self-esteem, you know you are bright enough to make your own decisions. Consequently you value your safety, your feelings, your health - your complete self.

The individual's thoughts perhaps have the biggest impact on their self-esteem and these thoughts are within their control, perhaps with some help at times from outside the family or school.

If you are concerned that your child's low self-esteem is affecting their day to day life, relationships or ability to learn and develop, it is worth seeking professional help, perhaps initially from their GP. If your child is under 18, your GP may decide he or she needs to be referred to a specialist within Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). Here your child may be offered talking therapy. You and other family members may be offered support to help understand the situation.

If your child is over 18 they will need to ask for the help themselves. However, if they are not willing to do this, you can still ask the GP for support to help you cope with the difficulty.

Youth counselling services, such as 'Youth Access' can also help, and young people may refer themselves. Most of these services will see young people between the ages of 13-25.

## **TALKING THERAPIES**

Talking is an important part of our relationships as it can strengthen ties and help us stay in good mental health. It can be helpful to talk about uncertainties and problems with family or friends, but sometimes they may not be able to help. If, for example, the individual is an adolescent or adult with very low self-esteem, he or she may be more likely to prefer to talk with a professional therapist, especially if he or she believes that there are other medical conditions associated with, or causing their low self-esteem. It is very important that your therapist is professionally trained. There are several types of professionals who may be qualified to offer talking therapies,

their job title usually reflects both how they trained and their way of working. They include:

- Psychologists - clinical, counselling, educational, or health.
- Psychotherapists
- Counsellors
- Psychiatrists
- Other health professionals trained in talking therapies e.g. nurses.

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE), recommends certain therapies for certain problems, but other therapies might work for you just as well - different kinds of therapy work well for different people. All the therapies listed below can help you work out how to deal with negative thoughts and feelings and make positive changes.

- Cognitive behavioural therapies (CBT) - [Outlined below]
- Dialectic behaviour therapy (DBT). - Combines CBT with meditation techniques.
- Psychodynamic therapies
- Humanistic therapies
- Other kinds of talking therapy, e.g. group therapies, mindfulness-based therapies, life coaching
- Support and information

## **COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY**

CBT is very successful in treating a whole range of other conditions besides low self-esteem, for example, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), Bipolar Disorder (BP), depression, anxiety, stress, addiction, anger, panic attacks, and sleep problems. Moreover, the Government produced NICE guidelines, recommend CBT as a treatment of choice for a number of mental health issues. This is based on numerous studies showing the effectiveness of this increasingly popular therapy.

CBT is an evidence-based treatment which is founded on the idea that thoughts, feelings and behaviours are interconnected. It can help you to change how you think (Cognitive), and what you do (Behaviour). These changes can help you to feel better. Unlike some of the other talking therapies, which focus on the cause of symptoms and distress, it focuses on the 'here and now' problems and difficulties, and the application of practical solutions. It looks at ways to improve your state of mind now. However, you may sometimes wish to talk about the past to understand how it is affecting you now.

The first consultation will address how many CBT sessions may be required. The number of sessions depends on your presenting issues, but generally tends to be short term - between six and 24 one-hour sessions. These sessions are clearly structured with the therapist directing the conversation. However, you decide what you do together, so you stay in control.

A child growing up with ADHD for example, is likely to have self-esteem vulnerabilities.

As a result of their poor concentration, forgetfulness, problem solving difficulties, impulsiveness and a need for immediate reward, they may experience numerous negative life events early on. These may include academic under-achievement, problems in making and maintaining friendships and experiences associated with risk taking behaviours.

Failure is likely to lead to low self-esteem as they begin to doubt their abilities. A negative mood means that the individual is more likely to consider subsequent situations in a negative way. Unfortunately, someone with ADHD may be very 'black and white' and not able to see or accept the parts of themselves that are absolutely fine. CBT can help this individual identify core issues, especially repetitive, negative thoughts, in order to think, act and behave differently. The challenge therefore, is to accept yourself, to like yourself and to build your confidence for yourself!

## **WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION?**

Mayo Clinic - [www.mayoclinic.com/health/self-esteem](http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/self-esteem)

Mental Health Foundation - [www.mentalhealth.org.uk/help-information/mental-health-a-z/T/talking-therapies/](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/help-information/mental-health-a-z/T/talking-therapies/)

NetDoctor - [www.netdoctor.co.uk](http://www.netdoctor.co.uk)

NHS choices - [nhs.uk/Video/Pages/building-self-esteem-in-children.aspx](http://nhs.uk/Video/Pages/building-self-esteem-in-children.aspx)

NICE - [www.nice.org.uk](http://www.nice.org.uk)

RCPsych - [www.rcpsych.ac.uk/expertadvice/treatments/cbt.aspx](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/expertadvice/treatments/cbt.aspx)

Young Minds - [www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)

Youth Access - [www.youthaccess.org.uk/about-youth-access/](http://www.youthaccess.org.uk/about-youth-access/)

"Helping Children to Build Self-Esteem: A Photocopiable Activities Book".  
Deborah M. Plummer Jessica Kingsley Publishers; 2 Rev Ed. 2007.

"Helping Adolescents and Adults to Build Self-Esteem". Deborah M. Plummer.  
Jessica Kingsley Publishers; 1<sup>st</sup> American Pbk. Ed. 2004.