

## Self-Esteem

A reciprocal relationship exists between self-esteem and skill development. As self-esteem improves, academic skills will increase. And as academic skills increase, self-esteem will improve. The caring and concerned parent must accept that positive self-esteem is both a prerequisite and a consequence of academic success.

Self-esteem can be defined as the belief that a person is accepted, connected, unique, powerful, and capable. Self-esteem issues take on a particular significance for pupils with dyslexia because self-assessment of this concept requires the ability to evaluate and compare. As these are skills that are extraordinarily challenging for pupils with special needs, they are often unable to accurately measure their own self-esteem.

Because self-esteem is a feeling, it can be measured by observing the way in which a person acts or behaves. Parents must become keen and insightful observers of their children in order to assess their self-esteem.

Pupils with **high self-esteem** will:

- Feel capable of influencing another's opinions or behaviours in a positive way.
- Be able to communicate feelings and emotions in a variety of situations.
- Approach new situations in a positive and confident manner.
- Exhibit a high level of frustration tolerance.
- Accept responsibility.
- Keep situations (positive and negative) in proper perspective.
- Communicate positive feelings about themselves.
- Possess an internal locus of control (belief that whatever happens to them is the result of their own behaviour and actions).

Conversely, pupils with **low self-esteem** will:

- Consistently communicate self-derogatory statements.
- Exhibit learned helplessness.
- Not volunteer.
- Practice perfectionism.
- Be overly dependent.
- Demonstrate an excessive need for acceptance: a great desire to please authority figures.
- Have difficulty making decisions.
- Exhibit low frustration tolerance.
- Become easily defensive
- Have little faith in their judgment and be highly vulnerable to peer pressure.

## **Developing and Maintaining Self-Esteem**

Remember that success should be measured against self and not others. Never make comparisons with brothers and sisters, neighbours or friends. While academic success is important, it is not the same thing as life success or even happiness.

Self-esteem means self-confidence, self-respect and self-worth. Develop self-esteem by giving genuine praise whenever possible. Promote activities that will yield success. Encourage your child to partake in social, sport and recreational activities that are available locally. Be aware that you should always speak privately and confidentially to the activity leader/organiser about your child's learning difficulty. Reading and writing skills are too often assumed by everyone.

1. Value your child as an individual with unique strengths, needs, interests and skills. Focus on your child's strengths. Emphasise and celebrate whatever he or she can do well.
2. Remember that your sincere interest can be more effective and meaningful than your praise. Demonstrate a genuine interest in your child's activities and pastimes.
3. Establish realistic, achievable goals for your child. Anticipate success.
4. When discussing an issue or a problem, avoid bringing up past difficulties.
5. Understand and show your child that mistakes are an inevitable and valuable part of any learning experience. They can provide opportunities to teach and assist.
6. Divide large tasks into smaller, manageable ones. This will ensure success, mastery, and retention.
7. Maintain a file of his academic work. Use this to demonstrate his progress and development when he is feeling down.
8. Encourage him/her to maintain "collections" (e.g., football cards, stamps, rocks, etc.). This allows your child to be the resident expert on a topic.
9. If he or she does not enjoy team sports, promote individual sports (e.g., swimming, gymnastics, and golf). This will provide opportunities for success, exercise, and peer interaction.
10. Communicate your confidence in the child and in her or his future.
11. Permit and encourage the child to follow the normal fads of his peer group (e.g., clothing, music). This will enhance his or her acceptance at school and in the local community.
12. Anticipate that your child will have plateaus, failures, backslides, setbacks, and regressions. Support and encourage him at these times. Kids need love most when they deserve it least!
13. Never, ever, communicate disappointment to your child. The disappointment of an adult may be too great a burden for a child to carry.

### **Remember:**

- Your child's self-esteem will be determined by the conditional acceptance that he receives from others - and the unconditional acceptance that he receives from you

and

- Your child's self-esteem will be determined by success and progress in four areas:

- Social (acceptance, friendships)
- Competence (in a skill area)
- Physical (clothing, attractiveness)
- Character (effort, generosity, etc.)

Emphasise, recognise and reinforce all four areas!

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