

HELPING A YOUNG PERSON BOOST THEIR SELF-ESTEEM

*This document has been produced has been produced by
Clyst Vale Community College's Counselling Service and is intended to help
boost a young person's self esteem. It is not a definitive guide.*

Self-esteem is how we view ourselves, how we value ourselves and how well we like ourselves.

Low self-esteem can lead to many psychological conditions, including depression, self-harming, lack of confidence, stammering and even suicidal thoughts.

Self esteem can go up and down, depending on how we are treated, how resilient we are, how long we have been under 'attack', the quality of the nurturing we receive, and how stressed we feel.

THEORY OF SELF-ESTEEM

Here are a few current thoughts about self-esteem:

- We are all born with a healthy self-esteem
- People who are significant to us can affect our self-esteem (parents, teachers, relatives, friends, heroes etc)
- Praise can improve our sense of self-esteem, especially from those people who are significant to us
- Criticism can severely damage our self-esteem, once again specially from people we hold as significant in our life
- Lots of praise from people in general can boost our self esteem
- Lots of criticism from people in general can damage our self esteem

KEEPING THE STATUS QUO

Our minds tend to maintain whatever self-esteem we have, whether it's a good self-esteem or a bad one. We maintain our self-esteem by using mental defences, developing a 'thick skin', or by ignoring and deflecting what others tell us. Similarly we can 'feed' our self-esteem, whether good or bad, by allowing praise or criticism in.

Basically if a person has a low self-esteem they may be prone to allow the least criticism to confirm their already low opinion of themselves and so maintain their sense of low value. At the same time they may reject any praise, believing it to be false, a down right lie, or perhaps by convincing themselves the praise giver doesn't mean it, is just being kind or doesn't have a clue what they're talking about!

SIGNIFICANT OTHERS

A person considered to be a significant other can play a vital role in increasing a person's self esteem. This is where parents, teachers and others can really make a huge difference to a young person.

THE QUALITY OF PRAISE MATTERS

Praise given to a person with low self esteem needs to be of sufficient strength to break through their defences. The phrase 'that's nice dear', won't usually work!

Quality praise needs to be precise, specific, genuine and preferably given while providing evidence. Remember someone with a low self-esteem is always ready to deflect any praise they receive, so providing evidence is a more powerful means of convincing them.

Helping a young person to think about their achievements, to acknowledge what they do well and to remember past glories can be very helpful.

Small successes or victories need to be affirmed.

THINGS TO AVOID

Avoid criticising the young person, this will only serve to affirm their low opinion of themselves.

Be very mindful of humour used. Humour can often contain a put down, and to someone with a low self esteem they will be able to use the put down to 'feed' their low self opinion.

Avoid shouting, swearing at or generally mistreating the young person.

Avoid dismissing or discounting the young person's views or opinions.

THINGS YOU CAN DO

Give the young person some quality time, meaning you should try to avoid distractions such as jobs that need doing, other siblings etc, while you sit or do activities with them.

Try to understand any problems the young person may be having – such as with friendships or homework, and help resolve them.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

A low self-esteem can lead to a life of misery. A healthy self-esteem may be *the* most important gift a parent can give their child.

Improving someone's self-esteem needs time and plenty of patience.

The school counsellors are available to speak with the student or parents. Counselling can help improve a person's low self-esteem.

HELPFUL WEBSITES

http://www.bbc.co.uk/health/conditions/mental_health/emotion_esteem.shtml

http://www.bbc.co.uk/relationships/improving_your_confidence/