

Unit Name: Self-Esteem

Parents, carers and families are an integral part of the Positive Living Skills Initiative.

The Positive Living Skills program is a universal and practical program designed specifically for children from Preschool onwards, and the principles and positive effects of the learning experiences can reach teachers, school staff, parents, families and wider communities.

The goal is to prevent problems before they develop, by implementing a positive life skills program from an early age. The Positive Living Skills program assists to create habitual positive, healthy supportive behaviours by guiding children to learn to understand and self-direct their own thinking processes, emotions, actions, responses and outcomes, and build effective self-management and social skills.

A child's self-esteem develops over time, starting from birth. Self-esteem in young children is generally positive and at this stage children may overestimate their abilities, particularly around the age of 4. As the child grows, they begin to incorporate feedback and experiences into their self-image, getting a more balanced idea of their capabilities. By the age of 7, and possibly younger, students are able to compare their performance against their peers and their perceived abilities or weaknesses compared to similar aged children or siblings becomes an important factor to their developing level of self-esteem.

As students become self-aware, they can begin to understand their self-talk, and then link this to their choice of focus and beliefs, and they can build healthy **self-esteem**. As they build skills to self-direct their thoughts emotions and behaviour in positively challenging and self-supportive ways, they will move toward achieving the outcomes they seek.

Definition of Self-Esteem:

Self-esteem comes from inside you. Healthy self-esteem is believing in yourself and being kind to yourself. It is being confident in the choices you make, knowing that even when you make a mistake, you remain proud of who you are.

A person's level of self-esteem is a direct reflection of their evaluation of their own worth. Our self-concept is based on our positive or negative evaluation of our own worthiness or capacity. Self-confidence is our trust in our own abilities qualities and judgements, and our feeling of personal capacity, and self-respect is our feeling of personal worth.

Developing and maintaining a healthy level of self-esteem means that we can feel capable to handle life's challenges, we have the capacity to understand and solve problems, and we feel we have a right to achieve fulfillment and be treated with respect.

Once a child has low self-esteem it can be very challenging to reverse their feeling of worthlessness and they can enter a cycle of negative feelings. Dr Danielle Tracey, PhD, Senior Lecturer at the University of Western Sydney, has spent much of her career studying and researching educational and developmental psychology. In her Learning Links Information, she talks about the role of self-esteem with children, specifically those who have mild learning disabilities. Having poor self-esteem can be more debilitating than having a learning difficulty. How a person views and values him or herself can have a significant impact on almost everything they do including their career, relationships, mental wellbeing and happiness.

Positive self-esteem can also have a marked effect upon a child's academic performance by increasing their motivation, ability to focus and willingness to take risks.

People with healthy self-esteem:

- Know what they stand for and are willing to defend those values and beliefs, feeling secure enough to question them in light of experience and of others' viewpoints
- Are sensitive to others' feelings and needs, and seek success, but not at anyone else's expense
- Believe in their ability to manage challenges and their ability to prevail despite negative experiences, looking for positive meaning from negative experiences
- Trust their own judgement to make decisions, even when others do not agree with those decisions
- Consider themselves equal to others, not superior or inferior
- Are able to ask others for help, and at the same time are confident in their ability to solve problems
- Spend more time in the present rather than in the past or future
- Learn from past experiences and are not afraid to take calculated risks

Research has shown that children who have healthy self-esteem:

- Are usually physically healthier,
- Have better interpersonal relationships,
- Are bothered less by worries and stress and are not so often depressed,
- Manage problems better,
- Try new things without too much fear of failing,
- Are more motivated, and
- Have less behaviour problems.

Techniques to promote Healthy Self-Esteem:

Beliefs and Self Talk

For us to understand our current level of self-esteem and to begin to build a more healthy level self-esteem and confidence it is essential to begin the journey to self-awareness. When we become aware of how we habitually speak to ourselves in our minds, and how those thoughts support our beliefs and views about ourselves and others and how we create our experience, we can begin to shape our self-esteem in healthy ways that support nurture and positively challenge us.

Respect

Respect for self is a key factor of self-esteem. Respect starts from inside us, and when we respect ourselves, we can give and receive respect from others. We respect ourselves when we make wise choices that help us to feel good inside about ourselves and we treat others as we like to be treated. We also have the courage to say no to something that we do not feel is right for us, despite external pressure from any source.

Physiology

By making changes to our physiology or body language we can positively or negatively influence our emotional state and sense of confidence and personal power. Strategies involving confident states have been proven to have powerfully positive consequences in both the short and long term.

Here are some ideas for applying the concepts of a healthy self-esteem at home:

- As children build their level of self-esteem, they collaborate more effectively with others enhancing cooperation at School with students and teachers and at home with siblings, friends and family members
- Greater self-esteem encourages more effective and assertive communication. Those at home can listen and help them feel valued
- Encouraging children to face and handle their own set-backs and challenges and to realise their own ability to problem solve will assist to build their resilience
- When students build their self-esteem they can focus more on the learning process and their own development
- When students have a healthy self-esteem they are happier and more likely to try new things and make positive choices
- Students with a healthy self-esteem are more inclined to be self driven and motivated for all pursuits within and outside of School
- Acknowledge positive behaviour and encourage strengths

*****For more information about the Positive Living Skills program, and to access free resources from the Positive Living Skills family link, visit www.positivelivingskills.com**