

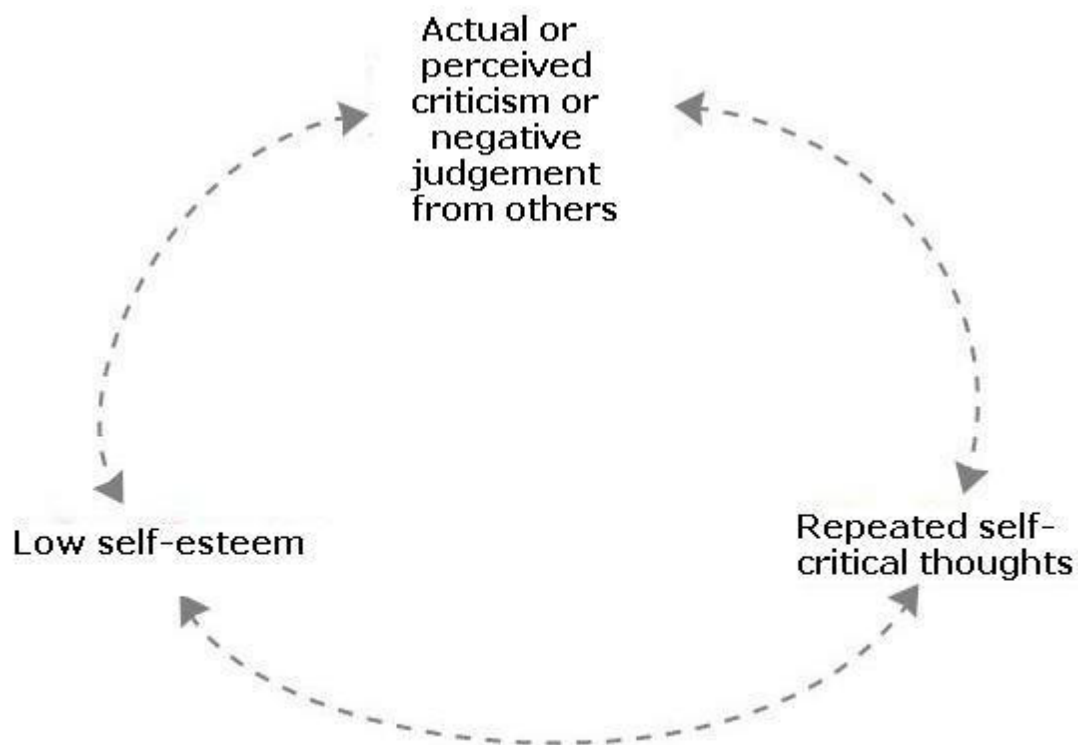
Self-Esteem and Children's Behaviour and Learning - How can we affect positive change

Self-Esteem and Confidence

We tend to go through life evaluating ourselves and others according to a scale of worth. The idea of self-esteem is the amount of value that we consider we are worth. These values vary from person to person. Whilst we might rate ourselves as being of little value, others might rate us much higher. If we get into the habit of thinking negatively about ourselves, then low self-esteem, or placing little value on ourselves, is the result.

Low self-esteem can be a result of negative life experiences, particularly when we're young and most vulnerable. These experiences may include being criticised or judged negatively, such as from a parent or school bullies. As adults, abusive relationships and very stressful life events can also cause low self-esteem.

Low self-esteem can stay low, because of our own self-critical thoughts, which can be triggered by criticism, or perceived criticism (even if none is intended, we believe we are being criticised).



How Low Self-Esteem affects Us



Emotions of someone with low self-esteem

- depressed
- hurt
- angry
- frustrated
- anxious
- ashamed
- guilty
- feeling unloved/unwanted

Thoughts of someone with low self-esteem

- Negative, self-critical: I'm so stupid, I'm worthless, It's my fault, I'm a failure, I'm not good enough, I'm incompetent.

Unhelpful Thinking Habits might include:

Mental Filter

When we notice only what the filter allows us to notice, and we dismiss anything that doesn't 'fit'. Like looking through dark blinkers or 'gloomy specs', or only catching the negative stuff in our sponges, whilst anything more positive or realistic is sieved, ignored, dismissed or we make excuses for

- *Am I only noticing the bad stuff? Am I filtering out the positives? Am I wearing those 'gloomy specs'? What would be more realistic? What am I sponging, what am I sieving?*

Mind-Reading

Assuming we know what others are thinking (usually about us)

- *Am I assuming I know what others are thinking? What's the evidence? Those are my own thoughts, not theirs. Is there another, more balanced way of looking at it?*

Internal Critic

Putting ourselves down, self-criticism, blaming ourselves for events or situations that are not totally our responsibility

- *There I go, that internal bully's at it again. Would most people who really know me say that about me? Is this something that I am totally responsible for?*

Compare and Despair

Seeing only the good and positive aspects in others, and comparing ourselves negatively against them

- *Am I doing that 'compare and despair' thing? What would be a more balanced and helpful way of looking at it?*

Shoulds and Musts

Thinking or saying 'I should' (or shouldn't) and 'I must' puts pressure on ourselves, and sets up unrealistic expectations

- *Am I putting more pressure on myself, setting up expectations of myself that are almost impossible? What would be more realistic?*

Black and white thinking

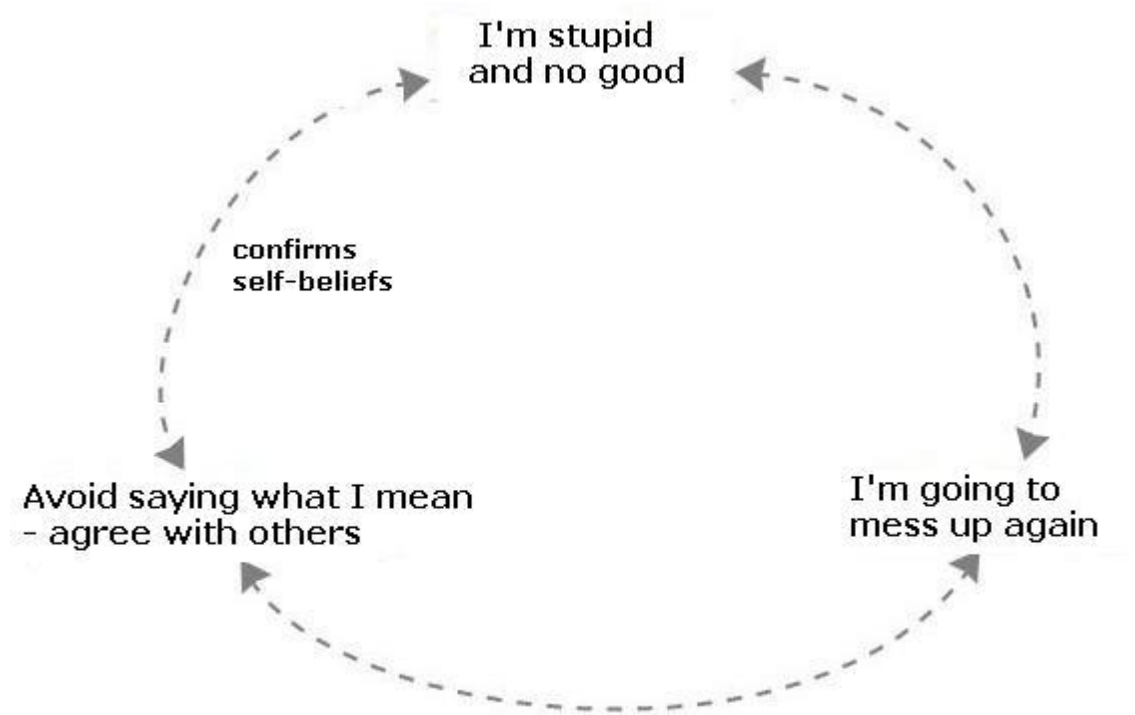
Believing that something or someone can be only good or bad, right or wrong, rather than anything in-between or 'shades of grey'

- *Things aren't either totally white or totally black - there are shades of grey. Where is this on the spectrum?*

Behaviours of someone with low self-esteem

- tries to please others
- is easily influenced or manipulated by others
- gets defensive when believing they are being criticised
- gives up easily
- blames others for own mistakes
- avoids responsibility
- avoids taking on new challenges or tasks
- avoids situations and people
- under-achieves or works harder to compensate and cover up our incompetence
- is shy and passive around others
- neglects or abuse ourselves
- discredits their own abilities
- tends to be overly serious, hypersensitive; afraid to be laughed at
- seems gloomy, fearful, worries, complains a lot

An example of how this can keep our self-esteem low:



Effects on Learning

Low self-esteem and lack of confidence can result in a negative educational experience as well as decreased personal satisfaction outside of school.

Confident students are the ones who are willing to answer questions or perform demonstrations. Likewise, these students are the ones with the higher grades, which will reinforce and increase their self-esteem.

Students who answer questions wrong, fail homework assignments or tests, and struggle when asked to complete a math problem for the class, start to develop poor self-esteem and low confidence because they know they are behind in their skills. They could then develop a pattern of avoiding trying activities because they are developing the belief that they are incapable of succeeding or progressing and in turn this hinders their ability to learn, which then reinforces their beliefs further and so on and so on.



Behaviours of someone with high self-esteem

- acts independently
- assumes responsibility
- takes pride in their abilities
- deals with their emotions
- accepts new challenges
- handles problems efficiently
- feels loved and wanted
- has a good sense of humour, is a good sport and can laugh at themselves
- makes friends easily
- is willing to take risks in trying something new
- works well with others
- seems happy and confident

Thinking about our own self-esteem as adults

Building Your Own Self-Esteem

There are many excellent books on self-esteem for adults. These are just a few key points to take into consideration:

- Make time for yourself. You are important.
- Look after yourself - eat healthy, exercise, do more things you enjoy
- Set regular short-term goals as well as long-term goals. Make sure they are realistic and attainable.
- Make sure any self-criticism is constructive not destructive
- Be ready to accept constructive criticism from others and to cope with unjustified criticism in an assertive way.
- Own your feelings. Don't assume that others know what you are feeling.

- Use "I" statements, such as "I am angry" not "you make me angry".
- Be able to forgive yourself for past mistakes.
- Acknowledge your successes and reward yourself.
- Let others notice if you're doing something well.
- Be proud of who you are and what you achieve.
- Stand, walk and talk confidently, act the person you want to be - play the role for long enough and you can feel more like that person
- Accept sincere compliments and praise from others.
- Resolve to eliminate self-defeating phrases from your speech.
- Learn the skill of being your own friend.
- Stop, pause, take a breath, ask yourself if your thoughts are unhelpful.
- Challenge negative thoughts.
- Take up a new hobby, learn a new skill.
- Do things for others - help someone out. It makes us feel better about ourselves.
- At the end of the day, ask yourself: What have I done or tried today? Have I done my best? What have I done to help others? Who has helped me? What have I enjoyed doing today?

How to help build your child/children's self-esteem

While many children develop self-esteem as they grow, for some children self-esteem must be nurtured and tended. Parents are at the front line of promoting children's self esteem.

Children whose confidence and self-esteem is built up learn better and are more control of their own behaviour. By building healthy self-esteem in children and teens, parents help ensure their kids grow up to become independent, self-sufficient adults as opposed to children who grow up believing the world owes them everything they want.

1. Giving praise and encouraging comments, as well as opportunities to discover and experience success.
2. Promote and encourage their interest in gardening, art, dance, reading, music, animals etc, and allow children to do for themselves what they are capable of doing safely.

3. After-school sports or other after-school activities help build self-confidence and a spirit of teamwork, which are important character traits to be learned.
4. Be loving and firm in giving children activities or chores, offer choices of chores to be done so they can learn how to make decisions, and learn consequences of decision-making.
5. Many parents do far too much for their children, so much so that their kids get the unspoken message that they are incapable of doing things for him or herself. Think back to when you were trying to help your young child get dressed, or when you were trying to help tie their shoes and your son or daughter said, "Let me do it, I can do it myself!" Children want and need to feel they can do things by themselves, without any help from parents.
6. Give children age-appropriate activities, chores and responsibilities within the home. i.e. help set or clear the dinner table, wipe the table, pick up toys/clothes/shoes, make their bed, help carry groceries, help put away groceries, make own lunch, sort and fold laundry, feed/walk family pets etc.
7. Praise your child for the effort, not for the outcome.
8. Be loving with your child, giving hugs and kisses regardless of achievements.
9. Help your child set realistic, attainable goals.

10. Avoid criticising your child's performance at a given task, and instead praise his/her enthusiasm or imagination.
11. Encourage your child to engage in activities due to interest, not ability.
12. Do not tolerate self-criticism from your child. Help him/her focus on positive points.
13. Lead by example. Do not criticise yourself in front of your children.
14. Foster a caring environment at home by dispelling sibling rivalry.
15. Notice them, smile at them, listen to them.
16. Share their excitement. Delight in their discoveries.
17. Suggest better behaviour when they act out.
18. Give them compliments.
19. Discuss their dreams and nightmares.
20. Stay with them when they are afraid.
21. Take time and concentrate only on them.
22. Kneel, squat or sit on their level.
23. Ask for their opinion.
24. Include them in conversations.
25. Show up to concerts, games and events.