



**Do your children have low self esteem?**

**Q.** The psychologist at my daughter's school sent home a consent form requesting permission to begin counseling services. He feels that my daughter's academic struggles are due to poor self esteem. She doesn't appear depressed to me and she is only 13 years old. Do you think she could be suffering from low self esteem?

**A.** Since I haven't met or interacted with your daughter, it would be difficult to say yes or no. I can tell you that young girls today, starting as young as 8 years old, struggle

with **body image** and low self esteem at an all time high in recent years. They can't

escape the 'ideal body' image that is projected on television, music videos and by

friends. The female TV stars, rappers, and models set the trend. However, the

majority of women, let alone teens, do not look like that. Many of the teen idols

didn't look like they did prior to plastic surgery either. In addition, teen girls can only

watch as teen boys choose 'slim' and 'pretty' girls who do fit into this mold.

Teen boys are suffering the same fate as girls, however, just in the reverse.

Most parents try to tell their young girls that they are beautiful just the way

God made them and to accept how they look. Easier said than done when you're a

teen. Parents must **not** overlook how important 'looks' and acceptance by peers are to

teens.

Another significant cause of poor self esteem is verbal abuse from parents.

**Verbal abuse** sounds harsh but that's what it is when you call a child stupid, dumb,

lazy, bad, no good or crazy. Avoid phrases like "what's wrong with you?" and the

worse thing a parent could say, "I wish you were never born." Nothing ruins a child's

confidence like mean words from a parent. Parents must also have good

communication with their children and know what they are up to and who their

friends are. A child being bullied and teased at school can become depressed and

internalize the bullying to mean something **is** wrong with him/her. Kids don't always

report bullying because they think it will get worse if the parent is involved.

**What is self esteem?**

**Self-esteem is a major key to success in life. The development of a positive self-concept or healthy self-esteem is extremely important to the happiness and success of children and teenagers.** Self-esteem is how we feel about ourselves, and our behavior clearly reflects those feelings. For example, a child or teen with high self-esteem will be able to:

- act independently
- assume responsibility
- take pride in his/her accomplishments
- tolerate frustration
- attempt new tasks and challenges
- handle positive and negative emotions
- offer assistance to others

On the other hand, a child with low self-esteem will:

- avoid trying new things
- feel unloved and unwanted
- blame others for his/her own shortcomings
- feel, or pretend to feel, emotionally indifferent
- be unable to tolerate a normal level of frustration
- put down his own talents and abilities
- be easily influenced

### **What if the teacher is the verbal abuser!**

It's just unbelievable that someone who entered the field of teaching and who would profess to love children, would verbally abuse them, but it happens. Parents must be diligent to listen to their children. When children complain about a teacher often it's because the teacher is strict and makes them work hard. However, it doesn't hurt to probe a little further to find out exactly why the child doesn't like a teacher. If you suspect verbal abuse, preferential treatment, or

non-verbal abuse (as in always ignoring the child) you must meet with the teacher and the principal and put an end to it. Never tolerate this kind of treatment as it also erodes self-esteem.

## **New Immigrant Children at risk!**

New immigrant children are at risk for low self esteem because their differences (clothes, accents, foods) etc. make them targets for teasing. Parents have to help their children transition to their new culture. Many immigrant parents try to raise their children as if they were still in the **old** country. This makes adjusting even more difficult for children. Parents must pick their priorities, for example, answering “what?” to a parent is a no-no and is not negotiable but the children can wear Nike sneakers like the rest of the kids. Youth often speak of the difficulty or ‘disconnect’ many new immigrant youth experience when attending city schools. Nearly one third of the total student populations in New York City schools are immigrants. This ever-increasing population of children begets an interesting challenge: how educators aid in the development of immigrant youth self-esteem and provide them with a sense of connection to their new communities despite the apparent language and cultural barriers. Visit [www.educationupdate.com/archives/2003/aug03/issue/metro\\_mentoring.html](http://www.educationupdate.com/archives/2003/aug03/issue/metro_mentoring.html) for the complete article.

## **What can parents do at home?**

Many parents become frustrated when their children shy away from new activities, parts in a play at school or church or when they don't want to be a doctor anymore. Not all children should become doctors, don't get me wrong. However, this is a sign of low self esteem. They don't believe they can do it anymore. This is why building children's confidence is so important. Then they can be whatever they want to be. Here are some tips for parents at home:

1. If you want to help your children feel good about themselves, you need to start with yourself. Your children will pick up important messages about self-esteem from how you act and talk about yourself.
2. Teach your children about good decision making and praise them when they make a good choice.
3. Appreciating the things you do and the things your children do.
4. Understanding how you are feeling and how your children are feeling.
5. Showing your children that you love them and are interested in them.
6. Listening to your children - when you listen you show that their thoughts and feelings matter to you.
7. Encouraging children to have a go at new things and giving them opportunities to learn through doing, without pushing them too hard.
8. Showing that you have confidence in them, eg "Tying laces is hard but I know you'll get there in the end!"

**9.** If you believe in them they are more likely to believe in themselves.

**10.** Let children know they create and are responsible for any feeling they experience. Likewise, they are not responsible for others' feelings. Avoid blaming children for how **you** feel.

**11.** Encourage your children to develop hobbies and interests which give them pleasure and which they can pursue independently and do well in. This builds confidence.

**12.** Let children settle their own disputes between siblings and friends alike.

**13.** Help your children develop "tease tolerance" by pointing out that some teasing can't hurt. Help children learn to cope with teasing by ignoring it while using positive self-talk such as "names can never hurt me," "teases have no power over me," and "if I can resist this tease, then I'm building emotional muscle."

**14.** Encourage your children to behave toward themselves the way they'd like their friends to behave toward them.

**15.** Help your children think in terms of alternative options and possibilities rather than depending upon one option for satisfaction.

**16.** Laugh with your children and encourage them to laugh at themselves. People who take themselves *very* seriously are undoubtedly decreasing their enjoyment in life.

**17.** Praise, praise, praise! For more information visit:

[www.childrens-self-esteem.com](http://www.childrens-self-esteem.com) , [www.childdevelopmentinfo.com/parenting/self\\_este](http://www.childdevelopmentinfo.com/parenting/self_este)

[em.shtml](#) , [www.parentlineplus.org.uk](http://www.parentlineplus.org.uk) ,  
[www.myoverweightchild.com/self-esteem.html](http://www.myoverweightchild.com/self-esteem.html)  
,  
[www.loveourchildrenusa.org/kids](http://www.loveourchildrenusa.org/kids)  
[teensselfesteem.php](http://teensselfesteem.php).

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