



# Thornaby Church of England Primary School

## Self Esteem

Healthy self-esteem is feeling good about yourself, feeling that you are a worthwhile person. While we all have self doubts at times, it is important for children to feel good about themselves most of the time. Self-esteem enables them to try new things without too much fear of failing, to reach out and make friends, and to manage problems they are likely to meet along the way. Self-esteem builds a solid foundation for coping with life.

### **What is self-esteem?**

Self-esteem is about valuing who you are. It is about liking yourself. It is not conceit or boastfulness, but about believing in yourself and what you can do in the world.

- Self-esteem is how you feel about yourself as a person and knowing that there are things that you can do well - in other words it is about *being* and about *doing*.
- Part of self-esteem is feeling that you have a place in the world where you belong - that you are part of a family where you matter. It is knowing about your roots and having confidence in your future. This can be a problem for children who have come from other countries and lost touch with their 'roots'. It can also be a problem for children who have been part of a family break-up, if they are split off from part of their family and the history of that part of the family.
- Self-esteem is about what matters to you. If you want to be good at sport but everyone tells you that you are good at art, it will not help your self-esteem very much. If you get encouragement and help in something you want to do, and you succeed, your self esteem will grow.

### **Why is self-esteem important?**

- There is a basic level of self-esteem that is needed in our family or culture.
- Self-esteem helps people to feel that they can develop their own skills and contribute to their community.
- Research suggests that when people have low self esteem they don't feel confident about doing things for themselves or using their abilities and talents in the best way they can.

- Low self-esteem is also likely to be linked to worse health outcomes such as stress, coronary heart disease and an increase in anti-social behaviours.

*It is important to help develop children's self-esteem from the time they are born to give them a good foundation and help prevent poorer health outcomes for them later in adult life.*

### **Cultural differences**

It is important to recognise that some people in some cultures believe that feeling good about your group or community is important, while feeling good about yourself as an individual is not as valued. In some cultures, it is common practice for parents not to praise their child for fear it will create a self-satisfaction that will prevent the child from trying harder. In some cultures praise is also avoided to prevent a child from becoming 'boastful'. However, having personal confidence and self-esteem does not mean giving up these cultural values, but it can add to them. Children when they feel good usually try harder than those who don't.

### **How self-esteem is developed**

#### **Babies**

Very young babies don't have a sense of themselves as being separate human beings so they don't really have self-esteem as such. They gradually learn that they are loved and lovable because people care for them gently, look after them when they cry, talk and read to them, and smile at them consistently. When this happens it says to the baby - *"You matter in the world"*.

#### **Toddlers**

As babies grow to become toddlers they still don't have a complete understanding about themselves. For example, if a one year old is standing on the end of a rope that she is trying to pull, she may not move her feet off the rope. This is because she doesn't yet realise that both the feet and the hands belong to her. One year olds still don't understand that all of their body and mind belong to them. Every time they learn a new skill they add to their sense of being able to do things and learning who they are. When they say "No" they are really saying *"I am a separate person and this is very exciting and important for me. I can practise this by saying 'No' even if I do want the ice cream that you are giving me"*.

Toddlers learn about themselves by learning what they look like, what they can do and where they belong. They find it very difficult to share

because they are just learning who they are and what is theirs. Toddlers see themselves through their parents' eyes. If their parents see them as special and lovable and show them and tell them this often, they will develop self-esteem. If they keep getting messages that they are not lovable or they are a nuisance, they will not so easily develop self-esteem.

### **Preschoolers**

By approximately three years of age children have learned that their bodies and minds are their own. They can manage time away from their parents or main caregivers because they have an inner sense of feeling safe. Their self-esteem develops in fairly physical ways, by comparing themselves with others, eg who is the tallest, who is the fastest.

### **Primary school years**

Many children's self-esteem falls when they start school and have to cope in a strange new situation with lots of other new children and new rules to learn. Self-esteem in the primary school years is about how well children manage the learning tasks of the school, how they do at sport, how they look and how they can make friends with other children. Stresses at home like parents fighting with each other, problems at school such as having trouble with schoolwork, being bullied or not having friends, can affect children's self-esteem.

At Thornaby Church of England School we believe building self esteem is probably one of the most important things we do for our pupils because we recognise that children will never reach their full potential without a strong self-belief. Success is not something we are born with, but something we learn, something we develop with help from those we care about or encounter on a regular basis.

### **Achieving success**

We believe that there are ten major skills which matter most in feeding success.

#### **1. Positive Self Esteem.**

Helping children to develop solid, positive self beliefs and an 'I can do it' attitude so that they feel capable of succeeding leading to a feeling of self confidence.

#### **2. Cultivating Strengths.**

Enhancing the children's awareness of their special talents and strengths so that they develop a pride in their individuality and

increase their personal potential. This will lead to a feeling of self-awareness.

**3. Communicating.**

Helping children listen attentively, speak up and get their message across increases knowledge and reduces misunderstandings. This will lead to a greater depth of understanding.

**4. Getting along.**

Giving the children friendship-making skills and helping them deal with stormy relationships and difficult personal situations leads to increased co-operation.

**5. Target setting.**

Helping the children to learn to target and work at what they want to achieve and to set them on the steps to success will lead to motivation.

**6. Not giving up.**

Guiding the children towards completing what they have started, even though it may be difficult will lead to greater perseverance.

**7. Caring.**

Helping children to have feelings of compassion and sensitivity to other people's feelings and needs will enable children to experience empathy.

**8. Problem solving.**

Teaching children how to find the best solutions and make responsible decisions will lead to self-reliance and self-discipline.

**9. Self-discipline.**

Teaching the children that they can control their own actions without the influence of others will lead to a feeling of independence and self motivation.

**10. Family self esteem.**

Working with parents and the wider family to ensure that they are involved and comfortable in the involvement will lead to a feeling of harmony, support and partnership.

### **How do we do it?**

All adults must share a common desire to develop self-esteem, building on the work of previous colleagues but always remembering that this is the beginning of a new relationship and therefore new opportunities. We will not succeed if some adults do this and some don't.

Over-the-top recognition of effort and success using words such as *fantastic, stunning, super, great, smashing, amazing, You're a star! etc* alongside a smile or a hug may be difficult for some adults. However continuous constant reinforcement of that feeling of being special is our shared aim.

Children need to be set appropriate challenges to develop the belief that 'they can do it', so teachers must be sure that we do not build in failure. Success and real effort must be celebrated. However we must never say it is right if it is wrong. Learning to fail and finding a way of putting it right is essential for the true development of self-esteem, but we should all have the opportunity to fail with dignity. It is the responsibility of the person in charge to make this happen.

The best way to teach children to deal with a range of different emotions and challenges is to model them. If this is true then we must be co-operative with each other. We must be calm, happy, independent, a good listener, prepared to speak up, have a range of friendship groups and demonstrate an understanding of the differences of culture, race and religion. Most important of all we should acknowledge that life is a lifelong learning process and that if you believe you can, you can, but if you believe you can't you probably won't.

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