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**The Unpopular Truth About Building Self-esteem In Children And Teens**

**By Ruth Wells**

At our live workshops, we often get requests for interventions that can enhance self-worth—and we do have many creative methods for all age levels. However, at class, we always offer a cautionary note: If a child hears at home that they are no good, or the child is called racist names, or is physically assaulted in the community, there is no strategy that can speak louder than that fist, that racist name, or that put-down from home. So, the best time to use self-esteem builders is when the child is no longer being put down at home, called bad names, etc.

It may not be a popular perspective, but it is probably correct: When children are currently facing events that generate low self-esteem, that is a normal reaction to the abuse they encounter. Your initial focus should not necessarily be to counter that reasonable reaction, but instead to help the child avoid, manage or process the abusive events.

For children who no longer face the verbal assaults or physical abuse, or whatever caused their feelings of low worth, that is the population for whom these interventions offer special value. Remember though, that self-esteem doesn't strike randomly, but generally is caused by the specific events the child has faced or is facing now. You must address those events and not just skim over them. With that in mind, when the time is right, here are some fun strategies that can help build esteem:

**Esteem Magazine:** Have your students put themselves on the cover of "Esteem Magazine: For Students Who Know That Esteem is More Than Just Hot Air." Have your youngsters fill the magazine with the items created via some of the next interventions (offered below), so that students create a publication that captures many of their positive qualities.

**Picture Us** Using a digital or instant camera, have a student snap pictures of your class members. List on the board qualities such as "good leader," "reliable," "kind to others" and "always willing to help." Have students sort the pictures to fit the categories using removable adhesive to secure the photos to the board. Have plenty of categories so each picture can be placed. Afterward, students can be given their photos with the correct category noted below the picture. An award ribbon can be added.

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**Caught Doing Good** Make award ribbons (that can attach to clothing with a pin) and are imprinted: "Caught Doing Good." Award these periodically to class members as the individual student's behavior warrants it. This is a great intervention for youth who are "always in trouble" and consequently feel bad about themselves. **Happy New School Year** This activity works best at the start of the school year, or it also works well in January. Sometimes students feel bad about themselves because they are failing at tasks at your school or agency. Have students make "Happy New School Year" resolutions, which can be placed into balloons and released into the sky (and later recovered.) Work with each class member to develop a plan to succeed at their resolutions. You can even have a "Happy New School Year" party, which can make it harder to be so completely sour and negative about your site.

**Everybody Know Somebody Who Doesn't Like Them** Sometimes some students believe that everyone should like them. Especially during middle school, chances are that most students will be aware that other youngsters do not seem to like them. That can be hard on esteem. Teach students that about a third of the kids will like them, a third won't like them, a third don't care, and if you feel

those numbers are similar to what you experience, you're doing just fine. Students can make illustrations that clarify what each third looks like.

**Before and After** Have students make "Before" and "After" pictures of themselves, similar to the ads for weight loss companies that show the person before and after they lost weight. This activity can help discouraged youngsters better imagine good outcomes. The ads can focus on any area from earning better grades, to improving hygiene to having more friends.

**Picture This** Have students cut up magazines and affix pictures to the outside of a paper grocery bag. The pictures should show the student's good qualities. The bags should show the student's name and photograph, and can be titled: Picture the Good Things About Me. A follow-up: students can write positive comments about their peers and place the comments into the bags so that the bags are filled with positive feedback.

**Everyone Makes Mistakes** Perfectionist students can quickly feel awful about themselves when they aren't perfect, when they make mistakes. To alleviate the anger they may feel towards themselves for missing a question on a quiz, or misspelling a word in a major spelling bee, help the students to discover that "everyone makes mistakes." You first make a mistake by tripping, for example. Challenge your perfectionistic students to make "mistakes" such as dropping their pencils, for example. Your goal is to reduce the sting and intensity of making everyday errors.

**Perfectly Imperfect** To further show perfectionistic students that everyone makes mistakes, teach your class that no one is perfect, that sooner or later everyone mispronounces a word or drops the ball in a game, for example. Teach your students that they can't be perfect, but they can be "perfectly imperfect." The more you reduce the anger and shame of making mistakes, that some perfectionistic students experience, the less their self-esteem will rise and fall based on performance. It is not healthy to have one's esteem based on external factors that none of us can completely control. Want more ways to work successfully with children with low self-esteem? Consider coming to one of my live Breakthrough Strategies classes (

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<http://www.youthchg.com/live.html>

), or order the course on

DVD/video (

<http://www.youthchg.com/tape.html>

). Some of the methods in this article came from my

"Learning to Like the Kid in the Mirror" book. View information on this book at

<http://www.youthchg.com/lessons.html>

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Ruth Herman Wells MS is the director of Youth Change, (

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more of her innovative, problem-stopping interventions at Youth Change's web site

<http://www.youthchg.com>

. Ruth is the author of dozens of books and conducts workshops, inservice,

professional development

### **Improving Your Teen's Self-Esteem**

**By Rene Graeber**

The teenage years are often the most difficult time of childhood. During this time, children are blossoming into adults and struggle to determine the individual identity.

It is no shock the teen years are the most dreaded by parents, but these fragile youngsters are at a critical time in their lives. Often, boundaries are pushed and rules are stretched by a teenager yearning to take that "next step" into adulthood.

Teens find themselves not only faced with emotional transitions, but also physical changes.

In the midst of these physical and emotional evolutions, a teen's self-esteem can be compromised. Parents can take certain steps in order to ensure that a child's self-esteem is not affected by the

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turbulent teenage years.

The best way to improve your teen's self-esteem is to take an active role in your child's life. By knowing his or her interests, friends, strengths, and weaknesses, you will be aware of any problems that may arise.

Starting from a young age, instill a positive attitude in your child. Children who have a great sense of self-worth are more apt to blossom into teenagers with a great sense of self-worth. Take time to talk with your teen instead of talking to your teen. If your child believes his or her opinion or thoughts have an impact in the home front, that individual is more apt to have a greater self-esteem. Allowing your teen to have a say in decisions that affect the entire family will further impress a sense of self-worth, thus positively affect his or her self-esteem.

Children learn by example, and teenagers are no different.

Teens whose parents showcase high self-esteem are more likely to exhibit self-esteem. Conversely, parents with low self-esteem or who constantly question their self-worth will pass those traits on to their children simply by their actions. The way you interact with your friends, family members, and colleagues will rub off on your children.

Individuals with low self-esteem set poor examples for their teens and should not be surprised when their teens exhibit similar actions. Children are like a sponge, so take care not to comment negatively towards yourself or others. Many teens with issues regarding their physical appearance learn these behaviors from home. Television, movies, and music play a huge part in any teenager's life. These outlets seem obsessed with a pre-conceived idea of perfection that will most likely differ from that of the average individual. Take time to speak with your teen regarding these issues.

Interaction with your teenager will allow you first-hand information on any problems he or she may be having and make an attempt to remedy these situations. Often, teenagers are quite sensitive about their appearance due to acne or other issues. If this is the case, consider making an appointment with a dermatologist who will be able to remedy the situation. Similarly, your teen may be interested in changing his or her appearance to best fit a burgeoning identity, but may be hesitant to approach a parent. Remember, teenagers straddle the line between child and young adult.

Although they may yearn to be an adult, the child part still needs reassurance from a parent. If you as a parent feel a requested physical transformation will not benefit your teen, make a compromise. Often, teens are looking to be outrageous in order to push boundaries set by parents. Instead of lowering your teen's self-esteem by creating a confrontation, create an atmosphere of discussion and compromise.

Open communication cannot be stressed enough. Take time to talk to your teen about their friends, classes, activities, or interests. Teach your teen to accentuate the positive instead of focusing on attributes they see as weak or negative. Instill a sense great self esteem at a young age that will continue with your teen as he or she grows.

You may wish to enroll your child in self-esteem building classes or extra curricular activities that will

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boost their self-worth. Whatever the case, taking an active part in your teen's life is the best way to see them through this transitional time in their lives with their self-esteem intact.

Without confidence, you would not be able to go on and implement what you have in mind. To find out how to build up courage, improve your relationships, boost your morale, and live the life you want With confidence just visit the website:

<http://www.self-confidence-self-esteem.info>



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