

HIGH SELF-ESTEEM IN CHILDREN

By Anthony M. Wanjohi

1.0 Introduction

Self-esteem is a term used in psychology to reflect a person's overall emotional evaluation of his or her own worth. It is a judgment of oneself as well as an attitude toward the self. Self-esteem encompasses beliefs and emotions such as triumph, despair, pride and shame (Levant, 2010).

Smith and Mackie (2010) define it by saying that the self-concept is what we think about the self; self-esteem is the positive or negative evaluations of the self, as in how we feel about it. Self-esteem is also known as the evaluative dimension of the self that includes feelings of worthiness, prides and discouragement (Hewitt, 2009).

Hewitt (2009) observes that high self-esteem in children is therefore the degree to which children feel accepted and valued by adults and peers who are important to them. The development of a sense of self is very complex. It is developed from within a person and shaped as well by the people around them (Katz, 1995).

Pomerantz (1995) observes that one's high self-esteem is also closely associated with self-consciousness that comes from feeling that one as a Being have value, that one is important, and that his/her rights and needs are important. Self esteem is the core of who a person believes him/herself to be, the essence of his/her perception of self (Hewitt, 2009). This paper seeks to explore on the importance of high self-esteem and ways of building it to children.

2.0 Importance of High Self-Esteem on Children

High self-esteem isn't like a cool pair of sneakers one really wants but can wait until his/her next birthday to get. All kids have self-esteem, and having healthy or positive self-esteem is really important. This section provides a discussion on the importance of high self-esteem on children as follows;

2.1 High self esteem and courage

High Self-esteem gives children the courage to try new things and the power to believe in themselves. It lets a child respect him/herself, even when he/she makes mistakes.

Pomerantz (1995) observes that courage is closely connected to high self esteem whereby if children have a high level of self esteem, they can usually find the courage and inner strength they need to take charge of their own life, to stand up for their rights, and to do what is right.

This is what allows them to claim their basic human rights as a person. Claiming their rights includes being able to stand up to people who try to take away their rights, either by force or intimidation, or by manipulation, or by trying to hinder them in choosing their own direction in life. A high level of self esteem also gives children the courage to act on their convictions to take risks when appropriate, to be decisive when necessary, and to focus or concentrate in order to get something done (Levant, 2010).

Coopersmith (1967) reports that having positive high self-esteem can also help children learn how to make healthy choices about their mind and body. If children think they are important, they will be less likely to follow the crowd if their friends are doing something wrong or dangerous.

2.2 Self Confidence

Butler (1998) Indicates that confidence can help children to take on the world with more energy and determination, resulting in better relationships, quality work and a feeling of being connected with their surroundings. Self-confident children usually can influence others more easily, as well as control their own emotions and behaviors more responsibly. A positive attitude results from feeling good about themselves and knowing that their place in the world is important and meaningful (Coopersmith, 1967).

2.3 Social Ease

Levant (2010) observes that children who have high self-esteem are more relaxed in social settings and when meeting new people. Because their belief in themselves is internal and not reliant on the judgment of others, they can freely move about without fear of rejection. According to the Kid's Health (2012), high self-esteem breeds a high level of comfort when facing new challenges. Coopersmith (1967) indicates that high self-esteem children typically are more enthusiastic about the future and convey that excitement to others through their walk, how

they hold themselves and how they converse. The positive energy projected by confident people is contagious and attractive to others (Butler, 1998).

2.4 Health

According to the Kid's Health (2012), high self-esteem and confidence are indicators of good mental health to children. Building self-esteem begins in childhood when parents can help to build the confident character of their children. Children growing up with confidence in their own abilities tend to do better in school, take better care of themselves than their peers with low self-confidence levels, and excel in sports and socialization. Teens with self-confidence are better able to withstand peer pressure and to make decisions with their own best interests in mind (Pomerantz, 1995).

2.5 Enhancement on academic achievement

Daniel (2011) indicates that high self-esteem leads to improvements in achievement since high achievement may be realized through high expectations and high self-esteem. The optimal learning state is not necessarily one of low self-esteem, where issues of anxiety, resistance or avoidance may arise, or one of very high self-esteem, where issues of apathy and false-confidence may arise, but one of an optimal level of self-esteem (Levant, 2010). Such an optimum, of course, may be student and task specific, such that considerations need to be given to the student temperament as well as prior experience in related task areas (Daniel, 2011).

3.0 Building high self-esteem in children

To build high self-esteem is to increase the capacity to be happy; self-esteem may make people convinced they deserve happiness. Understanding this is fundamental, and universally beneficial, since the development of high self-esteem increases the capacity to treat other people with respect, benevolence and goodwill, thus favoring rich interpersonal relationships and avoiding destructive ones (Daniel, 2011). This section explores on the ways of building high self-esteem on children as they are discussed below;

3.1 Focusing on good things

Butler (1998) urges that one should always focus on the good things that your child does. Of course you cannot ignore misbehavior, but you want to focus your attention on the good behavior. The more you do this, the more often your child will behave. Children do what gets them the most attention (Hewitt, 2009). This is especially wonderful if it can be done within earshot of your little one! By focusing on the positive things your children do and sharing this with others, it will be easier for you to see the good in them while also building their own treasure chest of success (Coopersmith, 1967).

Crocker (2002) observes that a kid's family and other people in his or her life like coaches, teachers, and classmates also can boost self-esteem. They can help a kid figure out how to do things or notice his or her good qualities. Coopersmith (1967) states that they can believe in the kid and encourage him or her to try again when something doesn't go right the first time. It's all part of kids learning to see themselves in a positive way, to feel proud of what they've done, and to be confident that there's a lot more they can do.

3.2 Communicating with children without criticizing them

Greenberg (2008) states that when children tell a person anything about how they feel, one has to treasure this for every moment that he/she can while keeping in mind that if he/she criticizes any aspect of their feelings, they will shut down and refrain from sharing their inner most thoughts with him/her in the future (Daniel, 2011).

Thorne (1996) indicates that one has to avoid criticism that takes the form of ridicule or shame. Sometimes it is necessary to criticize a child's actions, and it is appropriate that parents do so. When, however the criticism is directed to the child as a person it can easily deteriorate into ridicule or shame. It is important to learn to use I statements rather than You statements when giving criticism (Butler, 1998).

3.3 Developing a sense of trust

Crocker (2002) indicates that people who care for should provide a sense of trust that the first important stage of developing a sense of self in children. Children must learn to trust others so they in turn can learn to trust themselves. Adults who give warm, loving touches, cuddle their children, and answer their calls for what they need are providing the essential first ingredients to a healthy sense of self in their child—making the young one feel wanted, valued, and loved (Daniel, 2011).

3.4 Being generous with praise

Butler (1998) indicates that one has to use what is called descriptive praise to let your child know when they are doing something well. You must of course become in the habit of looking for situations in which your child is doing a good job or displaying a talent.

Pomerantz (1995) urges that when one's children complete a task or chore he/she could say, I really like the way you straightened your room. You found a place for every thing and put each thing in its place hence raising their self-esteem.

Hewitt (2009) urges that when one observes them showing a talent you might say, "That last piece you played was great. He/she really have a lot of musical talent. Don't be afraid to give praise often even in front of family or friends. Also, use praise to point out positive character traits. For instance, "You are a very kind person." Or, "I like the way you stick with things you do even when it seems hard to do." One can even praise a child for something he did not do such as "I really liked how you accepted my answer of 'no' and didn't lose your temper (Greenberg, 2008)

3.4 Teaching children to practice making positive self-statements

Greenberg (2008) indicates that self-talk is very important in everything people do and the psychologists have found that negative self-talk is behind depression and anxiety.

Thorne (1996) states that what people think determines how they feel and how they feel determines how they behave and therefore, it is important to teach children to be positive about how they talk to themselves. Pomerantz (1995) states that one's child can become an expert at this by listening to Self-Image for Children icon which combines relaxation techniques along with positive self-statements and mental pictures to help kids and teens develop their self-esteem.

4.0 Conclusion

Self-esteem refers to how children feel about themselves and expect to be accepted and valued by others who are important to them. Because it is important for them to feel accepted, a healthy sense of self is crucial for determining how they will approach life and interact with others. Self-esteem represents an individual's need to belong and feel loved unconditionally; it is not just a happy positive idea about oneself, but rather a reflection of one's character and self-respect. It is assessed by an individual's ability to handle life situations and tasks and is interpreted by the individual from feedback received from others. For example, if children believe they are good

readers, they will look for opportunities to improve and increase their reading skills; however, if they believe they have difficulties with reading, they will likely avoid tasks associated with reading and give up more easily when they are required to read. Self-esteem has many aspects and develops within the context of a child's evolving sense of identity and the ever-changing life tasks and challenges he faces.

References

- Butler, R. (1998). *Age trends in the use of social and temporal comparison for self-developmental hypothesis*. *Child Development*, 69, 1054-73.
- Coopersmith, S. (1967). *The antecedents of self-esteem*. New York: W.H. Freeman
- Crocker, J. (2002). *Hopes dashed and dreams fulfilled:Contingencies of self-worth and graduate school admissions*. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 28, 1275-1286.
- Daniel, L. (2011).Self-esteem. *Psychology* second edition.
- Greenberg, J. (2008). *Understanding the vital human quest for self-esteem*. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 3, 48-55.
- Hewitt, P. (2009). *Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology*. Oxford University Press. pp. 217–224.
- KidsHealth. *Developing Your Child's Self-Esteem*. N.p., n.d. Web. 27 Nov. 2012. http://kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/feelings/self_esteem.html.
- Levant,O.(2010).*Highselfesteem*.Retrievedfrom<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/04/080428084235.htm>
- Pomerantz, E. (1995). *Meeting goals and confronting conflict:Children's changing perceptions of social comparison*. *Child Development*, 66, 723-38.
- Smith, D. (2007). *A Psychosocial Approach*. Homewood, IL: Dorsey, 1975. Print.
- Thorne, A. (1996). *Situating adolescent gender and self-esteem with personal memories*. *Child Development*, 67, 1374-9

Suggested Citation in APA

Wanjohi,A.M.(2010). *High self-esteem in children*.

KENPRO Publications. Available online at <http://www.kenpro.org/papers/highself-esteem-in-children.htm>

Access PDF

[Click to download printer friendly copy pdf format](#)
