

## SELF-ESTEEM

Developing a clearer understanding of self-esteem and what affects its development should help you:

- help children feel good about themselves, and
- think more highly of yourself.

You are a very special person. There is only one you in the world. What has happened to you from birth to now and your heredity have made you what you are today.

Getting to know yourself will help you to help children feel and think they are basically good people. Children are not born feeling good or bad about themselves. They learn this from what happens to them. Self-esteem is the pride that a person has in himself or herself.

A person with high self-esteem feels worthwhile (good and capable). People with low self-esteem think they are not worthwhile and that what they do is not important to others or to themselves.

### WHY IS SELF-ESTEEM IMPORTANT?

How you feel about yourself affects how you act. How children feel about themselves affects the way they act. How you feel and think about yourself and how children feel and think about themselves can change each day. What happens to children before they arrive at your home will affect the way they act in your home. So, take time to listen to the children or their parents when they arrive at your home.

## SELF-ESTEEM AND CHILDREN

Some people are very important in a child's life. Who are the important people in the lives of the children you care for? They usually include Mom, Dad, brothers, sisters, and grandparents. Care providers, teachers, 4-H or other youth leaders, and television stars are also important.

Listen for clues that will tell you what kind of relationships your day care children have with these people. Listen to them when they are involved in imagination/pretend play, games, arguments, or are just talking with other people.

People who are important to children have a great affect on the development of self-esteem in the children.

### CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILDREN WITH HIGH SELF-ESTEEM

Most of the time, children with high self-esteem will:

- make friends easily,
- show enthusiasm for new activities,
- be cooperative and follow age-appropriate rules,
- control their behavior,
- play by themselves and with other children,
- like to be creative and have their own ideas,
- be happy, fully of energy, and talk to others without much encouragement.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILDREN WITH LOW SELF-ESTEEM

Most of the time, children with low self-esteem will say things like:

- "I can't do anything well"
- "I know I can't do it"
- "I know that I will fail"
- "I don't like me. I wish I were someone else."

## WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP BUILD HIGH SELF-ESTEEM

1. Praise each child's successes (even very small ones). Praise each child who tries hard.
2. Give sincere affection. Let children know that they are loved and wanted.
3. Show interest in each child's activities, projects, or problems.
4. Tell children what to do instead of what not to do. This prepares them for what to do.
  - Instead of: "Don't throw the ball."
  - Say: "Roll the ball on the floor."
  - Instead of: "Don't squeeze the kitten."
  - Say: "Hold the kitten gently."
5. Let children know that mistakes are a natural part of growing up. Everyone (including adults) makes mistakes.
6. Try to ignore temper tantrums and other negative behavior as much as possible.
7. Show appreciation when children cooperate, help you, say kind things to other children, obey the rules, and do other positive things.

8. Remember that learning new skills takes time and practice. Children do not learn new skills all at once.
9. Respond affectionately when children behave well. Tell children what you like about their behavior.
10. Let children know that you believe in them and expect them to do well.
11. Accept and respect each child's family and culture.
12. Provide activities that your day care children are likely to succeed at.
13. When a child misbehaves, separate the misbehavior from the child. For example, say "I don't like it when you throw toys, but I still like you. I know you will do better tomorrow."
14. Let the child know you believe in him or her.

#### ACTIONS THAT MAY LOWER CHILDREN'S SELF-ESTEEM

Try to avoid the following actions because they may lower children's self-esteem. This can be very harmful:

- a. expecting too much or too little from children.
- b. yelling at or criticizing children, especially in front of other people.
- c. criticizing children more often than praising or showing appreciation.
- d. calling children clumsy, thoughtless, stupid, lazy, etc.
- e. telling children who have made mistakes that they are failures.
- f. overprotecting or neglecting children.

#### REMEMBER. . .

When you understand and accept yourself, it helps you understand

and accept others. The way people who are important to children treat them and what they say will raise or lower the children's self-esteem. You and parents are the most important people in your day care children's lives. You are very important in forming their self-esteem. Children with low self-esteem need your love and attention the most.

## RESOURCES TO EXPLORE

*\*Encouraging Positive Self-Concepts in Children\** by Judith Myers -Walls, Purdue University Cooperative Extension, West Lafayette, IN 47905.

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Nuttall, P. (1991). *\*Self-esteem and children\**. (Family Day Care Facts series). Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts.