

Introduction

Many people have low self-esteem; it affects the way they view the world. Challenges become worrying obstacles, learning new skills becomes so difficult that they give up before they try. They feel inferior, no good, and stop trying. It is the same with children.

The 'Every Child Matters' programme lists five aims. These are to enable children to:

- be healthy
- stay safe
- enjoy and achieve
- make a positive contribution
- achieve economic wellbeing.

Children with low self-esteem will not find this easy. They will have difficulty in partaking in classroom lessons and succeeding. Their low self-esteem will hold them back and they will come to expect failure. If we want to help children in the primary school to achieve these aims it is necessary to raise children's self-esteem.

Our self-esteem develops and evolves throughout our lives as we build an image of ourselves through what we do and what we experience. Experiences, particularly during childhood play a large role in the shaping of our basic self-esteem. How we are treated by the members of our immediate family, by teachers, children and other adults all contribute to the formation of basic self-esteem.

Many children have low self-esteem. It is not surprising that they feel small in the complex and important world of adults. They are still learning to do so many things and their mistakes are often treated with dismay and put down to them being 'only a child'. Well meaning adults use phrases such as 'you stupid thing', 'that's wrong', or 'you ought to be able to do that by now' so often that it is no wonder that many children begin to feel inferior.

Some parents (and teachers) even try to shame children into doing things that frighten them. Rosie, a seven year old, in *Not all Tarts are Apples*¹ says:

... neither Uncle Bert nor Auntie Maggie were of the persuasion that the way to encourage a frightened kid was to jeer at it, in public or private. Some parents do that, don't they – shame children into doing things that terrify them? I remember being really shocked the first time I saw someone do that to their child. Even I squirmed with humiliation.

Promoting Children's Mental Health within Early Years and School Settings, DfEE 2001.

Mental health is about maintaining a good level of personal and social functioning. For children and young people, this means:

¹ Granger, Pip (2002) *Not all Tarts are Apples*, page 171, Bantam Press.

getting on with others, both peers and adults
 participating in educative and other social activities
 having a positive self-esteem. (p. iv)

On page 1 it states that children who are mentally healthy have been defined as:

having the ability to initiate, develop and sustain mutually satisfying personal relationships' and 'become aware of others and empathise with them.

Raising the self-esteem of the children we teach in school can only be a good thing. If we can encourage them to feel confident, successful and able to tackle new tasks they may begin to see the world as a place of wonder and adventure; a place where they feel confident to learn.

We can help children with poor self-esteem by giving them positive experiences and success which will help them to put aside any negative feelings about themselves. We must help them to accept themselves as they are, help them to acknowledge their strengths and limitations and still accept themselves as worthwhile beings. We can help to increase their self-esteem if we:

- encourage them to make choices, thus fostering independence in children
- thank them whenever they do something good and give lots of praise
- listen to their opinions with interest and enthusiasm, showing we value these opinions
- take the time to explain reasons
- encourage them to try new and challenging activities.



Self-concept

Self-concept is our awareness of our own characteristics. A baby has no self-image; it is formed at home as he grows. When a child starts school or pre-school s/he experiences other things for the first time and receives feedback from others outside the family. The child looks at how these other people see him, interprets and reflects on these impressions as his own his self-image is continually being reformed.

Ideal self

As the child's self-image is developing s/he comes to understand that there are ideal characteristics s/he should possess; that there are ideal standards of behaviour, skills and attitudes which are valued. This process begins at home, fostered by the family, and continues at pre-school or school as the child compares him/herself with those s/he meets there. The young child sees these ideal images around him/her and strives to some degree to attain them.

Self-esteem

Self-esteem is the child's personal evaluation of his/herself; the difference between the self-image and the ideal self.

Some children, particularly those with high self-esteem, aspire to reach the ideal self, working towards improving themselves, their behaviour, attitudes and skills; others, especially those with low self-esteem, find difficulty in achieving these aspirations and fail to move towards the ideal self.

Our self-concept embraces all the attitudes and beliefs that we hold about ourselves. This self-concept is linked to our self-image; how we perceive ourselves is based on how others see us. Our ideal self is a picture of ourselves as how we would like to be; the characteristics and behaviour we would like to possess. Our self-esteem is a personal evaluation of our self; this is the difference between our self-image and our ideal self.

Therefore a child's self-esteem is based on what other people think and say about him, how he feels, how he is valued. How you view each child is important; value him and he will value himself; undervalue him and he will do the same. Find his good points and praise them and he will feel good about himself; point out his poor points and he will be convinced that he is worthless.

Self-esteem is therefore circular:

- good self-esteem leads to good work, which leads to approval from teachers, which leads to more good work
- poor self-esteem leads to poor work, which leads to disapproval from teachers, which leads to even more poor work.

Where there is a negative circle we need to break it and get children into a positive one. As adults we tend to do the things we are good at and avoid the things we are bad at. In schools, we often find the things that children can't do, for example, read – and make them do more if it! No sooner have they reached a target than we push them on to the next. They rarely have time to celebrate their achievement before we move on. Is this really desirable? Could this not, in fact, be lowering self-esteem? It is really important to set achievable goals, praise the achievement and celebrate it well before moving on to new and more challenging tasks.

The *National Curriculum Handbook*, in its non-statutory guidelines for PSHE on page 136 suggests that activities and experiences across the curriculum will enable children to:

- recognise their own worth
- learn to co-operate
- become responsible for their own learning
- understand their personal and social development
- explore spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues
- respect common humanity diversity and difference
- recognise the importance of forming effective and fulfilling relationships so essential to life.

The National Curriculum states that teachers help children to:

develop relationships through work and play, for example, by taking part in activities with groups that have particular needs, such as children with special needs and the elderly; communicating with children in other countries by computer links, e-mail or letters

take responsibility, for example in planning, and looking after the school environment; for the needs of others, such as by acting as a peer supporter, as a befriender, or as a playground mediator for younger pupils; for looking after animals properly; for identifying safe, healthy and sustainable means of travel when planning their journey to school

feel positive about themselves, for example, by producing personal diaries, profiles and portfolios of achievements; by having opportunities to show what they can do and how much responsibility they can take.

While most people agree that raising each child's self-esteem is a good thing, it is not always easy to achieve. How do we measure how we feel about ourselves unless it is a reflection of how we think other people see us? The old notion about giving a child ten praises for each censure is still important to do, even though it can be difficult to find things to praise some children for. If we really want to improve the self-esteem of children in our class or school we need to find something to praise; even if we need to manufacture it! When they fall by the wayside we need to use encouraging and understanding ploys to stop their self-esteem from plummeting. And it's no good leaving all that to the teachers; building good self-esteem will fall by the wayside if ancillary staff, learning assistants, school meals assistants and other adults are not included. We also need to get parents involved. If we want to help children to feel good about being at school and good about learning we need a whole school programme.

Raising the self-esteem of the adults who work in primary schools is also something to work towards. The workshops in this programme will go a long way to ensuring that all adults feel cared for, wanted and valued for themselves and for their work in schools.

A whole school programme

Adults' and children's self-esteem will be enhanced when they are treated seriously and with respect; treated as intelligent individuals, able to understand and reach conclusions. As an adult we want to be treated like this and children are no different. Anyone, adult or child, who is belittled, patronized or put down will suffer a lack of confidence. Mutual respect will foster trust and confidence.

Everyone fails at times but when we do fail we should not feel that we are 'a failure'. Can we teach children that failure doesn't exist; that there will be temporary setbacks on the road to success and that he hasn't succeeded **yet**? Telling a child that he has failed or let you down is counterproductive. We must try to help children to believe in his or her ability to succeed no matter how long it takes.

If your school is to embark on a programme of raising self-esteem in children it must be emphasised that this is not only a task for teachers. Everyone in the school has to be committed to the notion that raising self-esteem is not only a good thing; it is also

essential for the wellbeing of adults and children alike. How we treat each other, how we interact, our body language as well as the words we use is important. Children learn by imitation; if they see an adult behaving badly towards another adult it will seem acceptable behaviour. Tone of voice, body language are both important, as well as conveying a sense of inclusion and tolerance to all.

This book seeks to give adults in schools tools to look at the way they could enhance self-esteem in children. There are inset sessions for adults, at the end of which everyone in school will have had time to appraise how they interact with children; how they use praise; how they use ways to raise self-esteem in order to make children feel good about themselves and their work, which will in turn raise the standard of learning in the children themselves. Some inset sessions are for all adults in the school; some for non-teaching personnel; some for teachers and classroom assistants.

As well as the in-service training for adults there are classroom lessons and activity sheets for the children. These can form part of your school's personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme. Some of these lessons are an integral part of the in-service training; others are for further work after the in-service training has been completed and before an evaluation of the effectiveness of the programme. There is also a place for the children's voice, which should take place before starting this programme. It will help you to find out the children's feelings about coming to school; where they feel comfortable and confident and where they do not.

This book, therefore, has five main sections:

1. Am I confident? A strategy for obtaining an insight into how children feel about coming to your school
2. Adult training sessions for mid-day supervisors (MDSs) and other adults working in school
3. Adult training sessions for teachers and classroom assistants
4. Lessons and activity sheets for the children as an integral part of the adult training
5. Further lessons and activity sheets for children as an ongoing part of their personal and social learning.

The Appendix contains:

- A useful self-esteem profile page at the end which could be used with older children as a check sheet
- The optimist creed
- Resources.

Summary of contents

Section 1 The Draw and Write classroom based illuminative research strategy: 'Am I confident?'

This is a Draw and Write research strategy to use with each class of children to try to obtain from them their feelings about school and any worries and concerns they might have.



There are comprehensive instructions so that a class teacher can do this with the whole class at one sitting and it should take 20 to 30 minutes. For classes where young children are still struggling to write for themselves it would be useful to have your classroom assistant and anyone else available to scribe for the children. These people should write only what the child dictates and not question them about what they say, even if it does not seem to make sense. Teachers of the youngest children may like to do this research strategy in two separate sessions.

This strategy should be done before any of the self-esteem work takes place in order to find out how the children feel before the start of the programme. This will provide baseline data. The strategy can then be repeated at the end of the programme. By comparing the difference in the children's responses, an evaluation of the success of your teaching will be obtained.

Section 2 Training workshops for mid-day supervisors (MDDs) and other adults

You may like to include other adults in some of the workshops; perhaps new classroom assistants or parents who help in school or others who come into contact with the children.

After a general introduction there are 8 sessions:

- a short pre-training session for other adults as well as MDSs
- a Circle Time session with children and teacher for other adults as well as MDSs
- Workshops 1–3, suitable for other adults as well as MDSs
- Workshops 4–6, mainly for MDSs.

Section 3 Training workshops for teachers and classroom assistants

There are seven training sessions for teachers and others who work closely with the children in the classrooms. The first one relates to the children's Draw and Write response sheets, the second starts with a presentation about self-esteem. The remaining five include the first five topics for children.

Section 4 Lessons and activity sheets for children: an integral part of the adult training

These are in the form of five lessons and each with an activity sheet for each of the three age groups (5–7, 8–9, 10–11) and are integral to the self-esteem programme.

Section 5 Five further lessons and activity sheets

It is suggested that these are used as part of the normal PSHE programme. Some schools may like to follow up these lessons with teacher discussions.

Classroom lessons and activity sheets

There are three sets of classroom activities for each topic, in three different age groups. Though age groups have been suggested, you may prefer to mix and match between the age groups to find work that is suitable for the children you teach. Each page of activities has an activity sheet. If you want to involve parents in enhancing children's self-esteem encourage children to take home their activity sheet.

These activity sheets are an integral part of each lesson and are arranged on facing pages with the youngest age group first followed by the later age groups. Activity sheets for the 5–7 year olds have a wordbox of suggestions to help children to complete the sheet. Children may choose not to use these words and there is space for teachers to add words that the child requests. Teachers are advised to look at the lessons and activity sheets for all three age groups to determine which is more suitable for their class. Some teachers may like to use ideas from activity sheets for a different age group to incorporate into their lesson. These lessons and activity sheets are also useful for children with learning difficulties if the appropriate level is selected and the child works alongside a learning support teacher.

See 'How to use this book' for more about activity sheets.



The following topics are covered in this book:

topics	5-7 year olds	8-9 year olds	10-11 year olds
being positive	the bright side being an optimist	positive thinking turns out for the best	challenges half empty/half full
same, different and special	same and different all special	different talents what makes me special?	good points special gifts
feeling good	feeling good at school what makes us feel good?	skills confidence	valuing achievements enjoyment
communication	listening and speaking body language	presentation how I say it	what do I mean? speaking out
praise and rewards	praise me rewards for us	give and accept praise treating ourselves	taking pride celebrate
doing well	I am good at getting better	growing well learning well	working well working better
friendships	being a good friend what do I look for?	working with friends family friends	grown-up friends role models
joining in	I join in with friends I let others join in	working together playing together	including being welcomed
making choices	doing the right thing good persuasion	good choices difficult choices	healthy choices moral choices
feeling confident	co-operating in someone's shoes	assertiveness self belief	strengths control