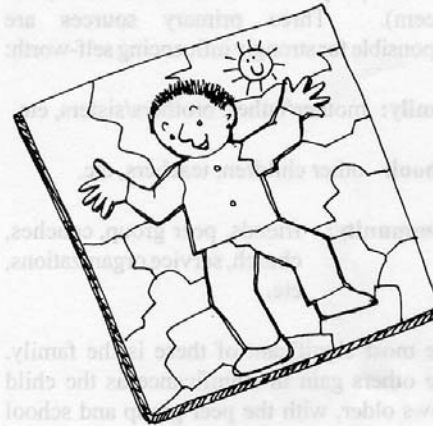


Chapter 6

Building Self-Worth



Goal: *To promote the importance of maintaining a positive overall self-worth.*



What is Self-Worth?

Our “self” is a composite of all the aspects of life that give us an identity. Our “self” is made up of our thoughts, feelings, name, culture, capabilities, competencies, family of origin, nationality, body image, appearance, parenting styles, relationships, and every other aspect of life, past and present, that makes us the unique person we are. Our self is our personality, our character, and our genes. **Our self is a picture puzzle made up of thousands of pieces all fitting together to make a picture.** Without all the pieces, the picture would be incomplete.

Our self-worth is the value we give that picture. That value can range from low to high and can vary during different times and circumstances of our life. One goal of life is to maintain a high self-worth; the fuel of life that drives our spirit to impact the world in a positive way.

Children and Their Self-Worth

Self-worth is the overall value people have of themselves. A self-worth consists of what people think about themselves (self-concept) and how people feel about themselves (self-esteem). Three primary sources are responsible for strongly influencing self-worth:

Family: mother/father, brothers/sisters, etc.

School: other children, teachers, etc.

Community: friends, peer group, coaches, church, service organizations, etc.

The most significant of these is the family. The others gain in significance as the child grows older, with the peer group and school becoming leading influences of high or low self-worth.

Why is Maintaining a High Self-Worth Important:

1. People with a high self-worth generally treat themselves, others, and the environment with respect. People with a low self-worth generally treat others the same way.
2. Others generally like to be around people who like themselves. Being around others who are constantly degrading themselves is a major downer.
3. Parents who value their own worth can more easily value the worth of their children. Children with a high self-worth do better in school, attract better friends,



make better choices regarding alcohol and drug use, and lead more successful lives.

Self-Worth and Life's Experiences

During the 18 years of childhood, there are 157,776 hours of life spent primarily at home, school and with friends. A child's overall feeling of self-worth is developed from the way the child is treated by others during the process of growing up. The most significant of these are the early years when parents and other family members make the biggest impression and set the foundation for future growth.



It's the early stages in life when experiences primarily shape and mold the personality and behavior of a child.

When the experiences a child has are positive, the impact on the child's self-concept (the way he thinks about himself) and self-esteem (the way he feels about himself) is positive. The result is a child who behaves primarily in a positive way because it's the way he's been brought up. The opposite is also true.

When life's experiences have been negative, the impact on the child's self-concept and self-esteem is negative, resulting in a child's behavior being troublesome and quite possibly destructive and hurting. ***The goal is to create a home that maximizes the positive qualities of life and creates a solid foundation of positive self-worth.***

**Our Self-Concept Plus Our Self-Esteem
Equals Our Self-Worth**

Self-concept, self-esteem and self-worth are terms that are often used interchangeably and incorrectly. It would be similar to using words like breakfast, lunch and supper interchangeably. Each has its own meaning.

Self-Concept = Thoughts
Self-Esteem = Feelings

Self-Concept is the way people *think* about themselves. A self-concept can be positive or negative. Some examples:



+ Positive Self-Concept
I'm a capable person.
I'm lovable.
I'm fun to be with.

- Negative Self-Concept
I'm incapable of doing anything right.
No one could love me.
I'm a bore.

Self-Esteem is the way people *feel* about themselves. Self-esteem can be high or low. Some examples.

High Self-Esteem
I deserve to be treated with respect.
I am worth something.
I accept compliments and can praise myself.

Low Self-Esteem
I deserve to be hit.
I'm worth nothing.
I reject compliments and dislike myself.

The way we *think* and *feel* about ourselves will determine our self-worth.

Can We Improve Our Self-Worth?

Absolutely! We have to want to improve. Growth is a continuous process that keeps life exciting and worth living to our potential. Throughout this book, strategies are mentioned to help improve your self-worth. But, perhaps the most important first step is identifying the labels we have for ourselves.

The perpetrator and victim within us just love to make our lives miserable. Any time they can throw a monkey wrench into the works of life, they will.



One way they exert themselves is by the negative labels they have for who we are or for the things we do. A personal label is like a name that, over time, becomes an identity. When a negative label becomes an identity, it begins to eat away at our self-worth. Some examples of labels include:

<u>Positive</u>		<u>Negative</u>
Smart	↔	Dumb
Able	↔	Klutz
Focused	↔	Scatter Brain
Friend	↔	Jerk
Considerate	↔	Absent-minded

It's not surprising that labels and self-worth go hand-in-hand. When people work on building their self-esteem and self-concept, the negative labels are quickly replaced by positive ones.

The first step to change is self-awareness.

Self-Labels Exercise

1. Write down a negative label you have for yourself.

2. What do you do (or don't do) to get that label:

3. What positive label would you like to have instead?

4. List three behaviors you can do to promote your new positive label:
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
5. Every time you behave as your new label, give yourself a treat. Reinforcing your efforts is an excellent way to change labels and grow.

Labeling Children

The image that children develop of themselves is, in large part, the result of parental perceptions. These perceptions are expressed in labels: names we give our children based on any element of their existence. These labels can be positive or negative. Some examples :

Positive

Cooperative ↔ Intelligent ↔ Active

Negative

Uncooperative ↔ Stupid ↔ Lazy

What's in a label? An identity. It doesn't help that labels are used in school (gifted, learning

disabled, etc.) and by a peer group (jock, geek, etc.) In truth, it's difficult for children to develop positive self-worth when it appears the world is ready to label them - with emphasis on the negative. ***A good rule to follow is one that's centuries old: "If you can't say something nice about someone, don't say anything at all."***



Changing Parents' Negative Label of Their Children

1. Write down a negative label you have for your child.

2. What does the child do when she's being that label?

3. Write down the behavior you would like to see instead.

4. Give that desired behavior a name:

5. List three ways you can help your child perform the desired behavior:
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
6. Every time you see your child behaving in the desired way, tell your child how proud you are of their efforts. Throw in a hug with the compliment.
7. Focus on the desired behavior. Consistent support is the answer to change that will last a lifetime.

Ten Ways to Improve a Child's Self-Worth

1. **Put children in situations where they can succeed at doing what you want them to do.** For instance, if a child is unsure of himself, give the child an opportunity to develop self-confidence by experiencing success, such as helping pick out fruits and vegetables, or pushing the shopping cart.
2. **Expect the child to succeed in a small, specific situation.** If you expect children to succeed all the time in all situations, you will be very disappointed. It is not a realistic goal.
3. **If your child does not succeed in a specific situation, problem solve and determine what is undermining the child's attempts at success.**
4. **Every time you see your child behaving in the desired way, praise him - and write it down.** Try to remember other times in the past when you have seen the desired behavior and then you can have a list or a "story" of successes. You can either read this to the child when the child is feeling down, or use it as a bedtime power story so the child can go to sleep with this new and successful picture in his mind.
5. **Tell someone else how the child is behaving, and make certain the child can hear you.** Call someone and recount the successes. If no one is home, talk to



the dial tone. Make it realistic so the child believes you're sharing your pride.

6. **Act in a way you want your child to act, then praise yourself for acting that way.**
7. **Visualize your child as already being the new positive label, and then relate to the child with the new label as part of the child.**
8. **Show respect for the child's feelings and opinions even though you might not agree with them.** Honor your child's opinions and feelings by saying, "I can understand how you might feel this way." The child's feelings and opinions are a part of the child as much as your feelings and opinions are a part of you.
9. **Be careful to give children comments on their strengths as well as on their weaknesses.** Often we are so intent on helping children get rid of all their "bad" qualities that we neglect to comment on all the good ones we see. Keep track for a few days of the balance of your comments by dividing a sheet of paper into two columns; one labeled *Strengths* and the other labeled *Weaknesses*. Then put each comment in the appropriate side and see how you do. Try to have five to ten times the number of comments that focus on the *Strengths*.
10. **Be patient.** Change is an evolutionary process - not a revolutionary one. It takes time to change. Stay focused and above all, be consistent.

