Low Self-Esteem: Supporting Kids and Teens

Low self-esteem is quite common among young people. To help, we need to understand how self-esteem affects one's mindset. Below is more on causes and effects of low self-esteem in a child, and ways to support them.

> **Self-esteem** is the overall opinion a person has about themselves – how they perceive their abilities and worth, their self-confidence, and their sense of security.

Causes of Low Self-Esteem. Below are a few of the many reasons a child may have low self-esteem.

- **Adverse Childhood Experiences.** ACES are events that occur during a child's development that may be traumatic, such as neglect, witnessing violence, the death of a family member, or the imprisonment of a loved one.
- **Societal Pressures and Expectations**. When constantly exposed to others' successes and highly edited photos on social media, it's hard to resist not feeling good enough.

- **Attacks on Identity**. Hurtful messages about marginalized groups can shake a young person's pride in a fundamental part of their identity such as their culture, race, sexuality, gender, or socio-economic class. Those with chronic illnesses, physical impairments, learning disorders or mental health issues face similar challenges.
- **Chronic Criticism**. We all need compassion, empathy, and encouragement.

Effects of Low Self-Esteem. A young person struggling with low self-esteem may:

- Have trouble forming friendships and other healthy relationships
- Become more withdrawn from friends
- Have less confidence and not taking healthy risks, like auditioning for a sport or the school play
- Find it hard to embrace healthy confrontations and self-advocacy when they need to stand up to a bully or argue for their values

- Struggle to make important decisions like choosing classes to take or whether to accept a leadership position in a club
- Have difficulty saying no under peer pressure, such as when pressured to use substances or drive under the influence
- Tend to suffer from anxiety, depression, loneliness, or addiction later in life

7 Ways to Help Kids Increase Self-Esteem. Helping a child to develop healthy self-esteem supports their inner strength and confidence and helps them learn from their failures. Caring adults can:

1. **Show unconditional love, encouragement, and compassion** even if they fail or misbehave.

2. **Help them have a positive impact on others** through volunteering or assisting at school or at home.

3. **Help them improve their favorite skills.** When kids feel proud of their abilities, they feel more positive about themselves.

4. **Help them develop a realistic and positive view of themselves** by reflecting accurately on their strengths and weaknesses, in a non-judgmental way.

5. **Give them a chance to take responsibility for their actions**. This includes the chance to apologize when they experience a conflict.

6. **Support them in taking pride in their unique identity and their differences**, including sexuality, gender identity, race, ethnicity, culture, language, and religion.

7. **Model positive behaviors** such as how you practice self-compassion, and don't hide your setbacks from them.

Thanks for all you do to support a young person in your life. It really makes a difference.

For more resources on self-esteem and other topics, visit us online: mghclaycenter.org