

Enhancing Self-esteem

IN CHILDREN & YOUTH

Lifelong Mental Health Management: Middle Childhood

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A lifetime of comparisons

Around the age of seven, children begin to compare themselves to those around them. The results of these comparisons form the basis for self-esteem.

In elementary school, children begin to spend more time with peers and care greatly about their views and opinions. They behave in ways that will result in peer approval.

At this time, they also begin to split their self-esteem into components: academic, social and physical.

By adolescence, new dimensions are added, including intimate friendship, romantic appeal and job competence – though physical appearance remains a major factor, along with relationships with parents and peers.

While children with low self-esteem generally do not do as well in school, it is important to consider the causes of low self-esteem when parents are trying to bolster it.

For instance, telling a child that they are 'great' is much more likely to increase self-esteem if specific examples are provided. Similarly, boosting a child's academic self-esteem is often best achieved by helping them with school work and building a child's academic capacity.



Consequences

Low self-esteem can lead to:

- ◆ depression
- ◆ suicide
- ◆ anorexia
- ◆ delinquency
- ◆ other adjustment problems

POSITIVE PARENTING

The following attributes of parents have been associated with high self-esteem in boys:

- ◆ Expression of affection
- ◆ Concern about problems
- ◆ Harmony in the home
- ◆ Participation in family activities
- ◆ Availability of help when boys need it
- ◆ Setting clear and fair rules
- ◆ Abiding by these rules
- ◆ Allowing boys freedom within well-prescribed limits

How to increase self-esteem in adolescents

- ◆ Identify the cause of low self-esteem and the traits that they are most self-conscious about.
- ◆ Encourage adolescents to reflect on the traits they are proud of.
- ◆ Emotional support and acceptance from peers can increase self-esteem.
- ◆ Personal achievements can also help.
- ◆ Teaching skills to adolescents often results in increased achievement and enhanced self-esteem.
- ◆ Self-esteem is also enhanced when adolescents face up to problems instead of avoiding them.