

SELF-ESTEEM

A Handout for parents and children

By the Lee Medical Practice

Good self-esteem and confidence is very important not only for good self-image but also for learning and the development of basic skills. Good self-esteem allows children to cope in a variety of social situations, be able to form relationships with ease and respond positively to constructive criticism and have the confidence to effect change. It is important to ensure that every child has good self-esteem to ensure that they have the confidence to cope with adult life. This leaflet is designed to give advice on how to develop and make use of strategies to build self-confidence and self-esteem.

What is good self-esteem?

There are a number of factors, which attribute to good self-esteem. These include:

- feeling good about yourself
- liking yourself
- feeling loved/valued
- thinking others like you
- thinking that you look good
- feeling you have a good relationship with adults and children
- you feel confident about talking about new things
- you generally enjoy life
- feeling happy
- not worrying about what others think of you
- not putting yourself down and being able to recognise and label good/positive qualities in yourself
- being able to co-operate and work with others
- being able to accept positive criticism
- feeling positive about life and knowing that you are as good as everyone else
- not feeling down/jealous of others

What is positive about me?

It is important for your child to consider what they like about themselves. There a number of different things that children can write about - it may be the colour of their eyes or hair, nice clothes, the fact that they like animals, or are kind to others. They should fill out sheet 1 and 2 at the end of the leaflet and place it in a viewable spot (back of their bedroom door or the fridge) so they can refer back to it whenever they have negative feelings about themselves.

It is essential that your child thinks positively about themselves and adapts positive thinking. Many children with low esteem think negatively about themselves. For example they might think “I am in the lowest maths group and I feel thick and people think I am stupid”. It is vital for them to turn these thoughts around to be positive. For example “Everyone else in the group is in the same position so we can get the help we need. The work is at the right level for me so I will learn without feeling frustrated”. Ask your child to complete sheet 3 of the things that they think negatively about themselves and how they can change these into positive thoughts.

Making the right environment

Children who exhibit poor self-esteem may feel worthless and useless. As a consequence they may exhibit defensive and aggressive behaviour towards others. They are generally caught up in a cycle of negative thinking which can appear impossible to break free from.

There are certainly a number of pressures placed upon children, which will have an affect on self-esteem. These include social pressures (to be popular and wanted by friends and for the older child to “look right”), to be good at sports (to be in the teams) and academic pressures (to be reasonably successful academically). For the child with Dyspraxia and co-ordination difficulties these pressures may well reinforce personal inadequacies and make the child withdraw and feel frustrated.

How to make the correct environment:

- Arrange social situations in which your child can experience success. If your child for example has difficulty making friends, invite a friend (or someone your child quite likes) over and organise their time together. Make sure there are a number of different things for them to do. This could involve playing games you know your child is good at, cooking together, having a treasure hunt, making things, playing in the garden or taking them out such as to the cinema, a meal or ten pin bowling. If your child has difficulty talking to others help in the conversation by asking questions which involve more than just one-word answers. For the older child, teach your child some basic questions to ask in a conversation.
- Praise your child in a meaningful way – do not go over the top but sensitively praising good effort and skills. Ensure that the school also gives positive encouragement as much as possible.

- Show that you value and care about your child's news and feelings make time to listen every day to what has happened in their day.
- Tell your child that you love and are proud of them frequently.
- Allow your child to make choices and to take responsibilities in the home context (see below). This could involve choosing their own clothes to wear and buy, having small jobs to do such as laying the table, tidying away. It is vital that they know who they are an important and useful member of the family.
- Ensure that your child has access to group activities where he/she is encouraged to take turns and cooperate.
- Encourage your child to give and receive compliments.
- Help to develop your child's empathy i.e. Awareness of other's feelings.
- Encourage your child to join in new games and activities but ensure that these are ones that you know your child will have success in.
- Encourage your child to highlight and identify good qualities in themselves and those around them.
- Ensure that adults around them promote your child's self-confidence. This could be grandma phoning when they have been successful or done well at something, a brother or other relative taking time to listen, play games, help with homework, doing jobs together. Ensure that your child is not compared to others and not told how another sibling or relative is doing better than they are.
- Consider situations and whether they are promoting your child's self-confidence. If it has not, how you can change it for the better.
- Give positive criticism. For example rather than saying "your room looks like a pig sty" try saying, "it would be useful if you could tidy one section of the room and I will then help you with another. May be we could organise the room better to help you keep it more tidy"

Taking responsibility

It is important for children to take responsibility for themselves as this will further develop their self-esteem. By giving responsibility your child will be able to:

- learn from their mistakes and successes
- adapt to change
- enable them to stand on their own two feet
- encourage them to be independent
- understand that they are an important member of the family
- enable them to draw on their own resources and to find solutions for themselves
- identify problems and concerns
- learn to make choices and decisions for themselves
- give them confidence and a positive self-image
- become more aware of other needs and situations

Some of the activities that children can do include:

- make the bed
- get breakfast
- lay and clear the table
- tidy their rooms
- choose and set out the clothes for the next day
- wash and dry the dishes
- tidy and help to look after the garden
- feed the pets
- choose their own clothes to buy
- help to make decisions about their own lives
- go shopping (for the older child)

Self confidence for the older child

As children reach secondary school, having good self-esteem becomes more important if they are to cope with the pressures placed upon them. They have a number of social pressures such as looking right, having to be popular and wanted as friends, be good at sports and be reasonably successful academically without being seen as a boffin. Adolescents with Dyspraxia often find most of these areas difficult and will need support not only to cope with the various situations but also have and maintain a good self-esteem and self-image. The strategies listed above are just as useful for the child in secondary school as they are for the younger child. In addition, it is important that they have good self-respect. This is essential for good self-esteem and self-image. Sheet 4 provides an exercise to help build respect.

Adolescents who have low levels of self-esteem may find it difficult to accept praise or positive comments from others. Alternatively they may demand an inappropriate amount of positive feedback and attention. It is important to get a balance so that they feel able to accept genuine compliments with good grace. It is important that they understand that peers may make comments, which are in fact not compliments and they need to know how they should deal with these comments. An action plan should be developed so that they know exactly how to react and what actions need to be carried out (e.g. they may say “thank you for that comment” or ignore it and then they should walk away from the situation). In addition, they should be able to give honest and genuine compliments. Making compliments to their siblings may be an easy way to start such as saying “you were kind to do that for me” or to a friend “you are a good friend because.... ” In order to make compliments they should follow the action list below:

- * ***think*** - what is it that I want to say
- * ***plan*** - this is how and when I will say it
- * ***talk*** - actually saying it

In addition, children who have low esteem often find it difficult to accept positive criticism or be able to distinguish between positive and negative remarks or comments. They often feel that when any comments are made to them “people are getting at them”. Initially it is necessary for the child to understand the difference between negative and positive criticism.

Negative criticism may be thought of as:

- people wanting to pull you down or make you feel bad about yourself
- not offering any help to improve yourself
- making you feel unhappy

Positive criticism however, may be considered as:

- being given because people want you to succeed by changing the way you do something
- being given to point you in the right direction
- it may make you feel a little uneasy to start with but it will make you a better person and help you

In order to deal with criticism it is vital that children follow the process of:

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| • stop and think: | listen carefully to what has been said |
| • wait: | think carefully what has been said and decide if you think it is true and if the comments made are correct |
| • go for it: | say how you feel and work out a solution together |

An example could be a mother saying: “you always look a mess. Just look at yourself in the mirror!”

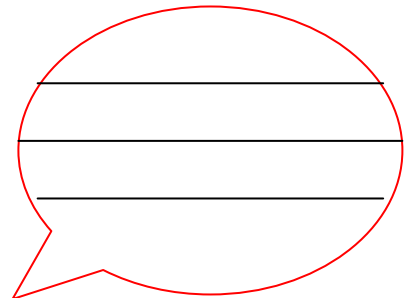
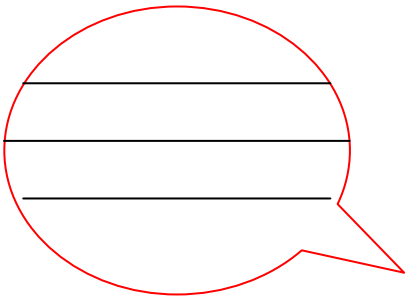
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| • stop and think: | what has just been said? |
| • wait: | is it true that I always look a mess?
why does she think I look a mess – I am just trying to look the same as the others? |
| • go for it: | yes I do look a bit scruffy
so explain to your mother that you want to fit in and look like your friends. however, you will compromise and tuck in your shirt and brush your hair before you leave and check that you look ok in the mirror |

References:

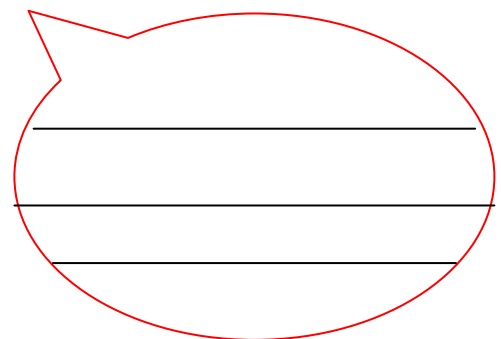
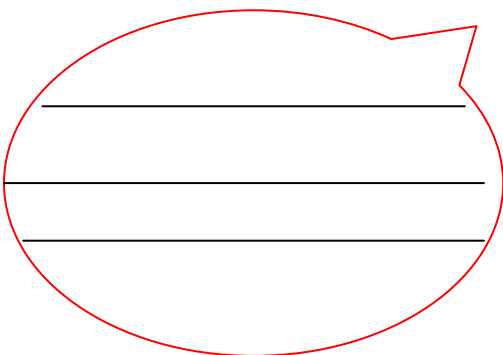
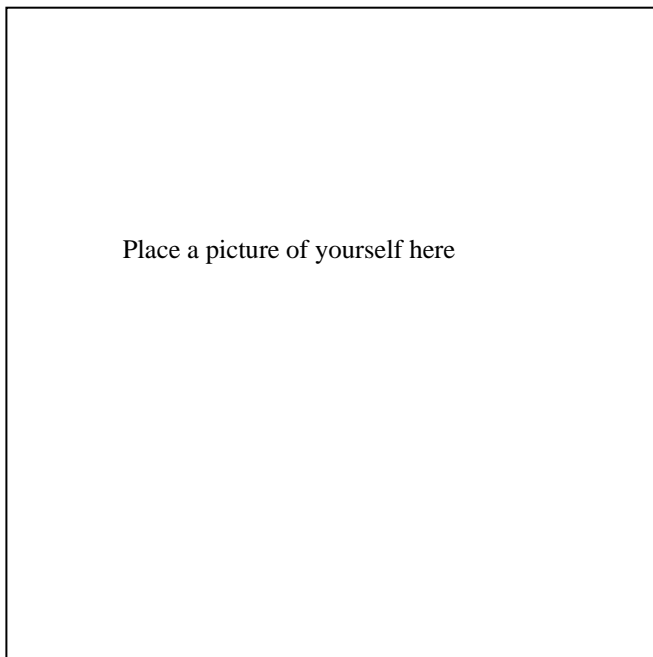
Confidence, Assertiveness, Self Esteem by Tina Rae. Published by Lucky Duck Publishing Ltd, Bristol

Developing Parenting Skills, Confidence and Self – Esteem by Barbara Quartey and Tina Rae. Published by Luck Duck Publishing Ltd, Bristol

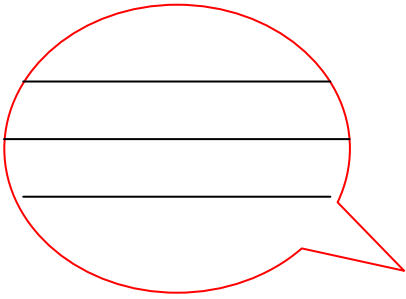
SHEET 1 - What I like about me:



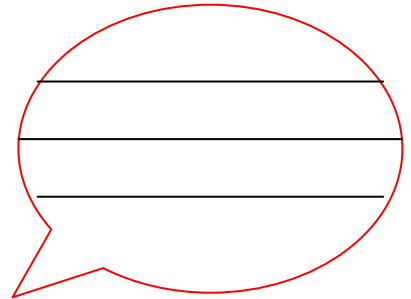
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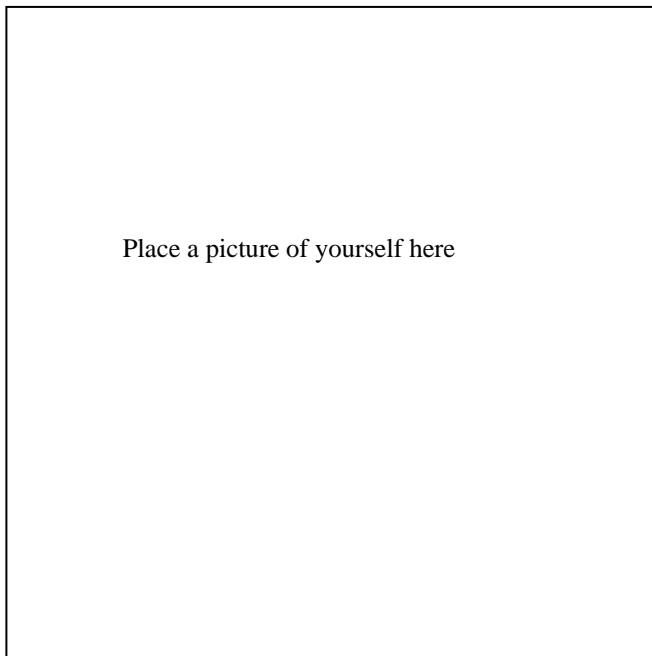
SHEET 2 – What I am good at



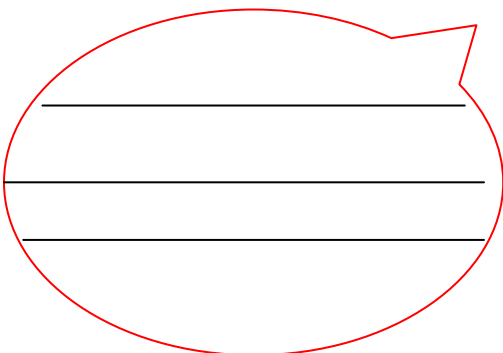
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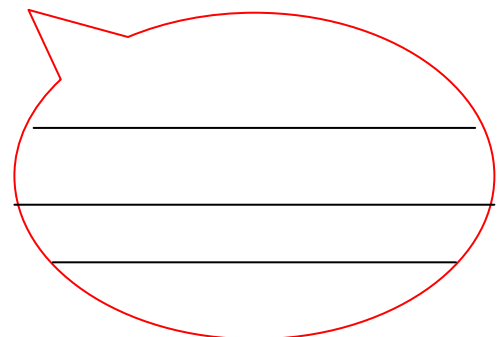
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Place a picture of yourself here



A red speech bubble with a tail pointing towards the top right. It contains three horizontal black lines for writing.



A red speech bubble with a tail pointing towards the top left. It contains three horizontal black lines for writing.

SHEET 3 - Making positive thoughts

NEGATIVE THOUGHT	POSITIVE THOUGHT
e.g. I am useless at maths and in the bottom group	I am in the group that is at the right level for me to help me learn without being frustrated. If I am stuck I need to ask the teacher or my parent to help me.
I am bored and unhappy	You need to plan a treat. What would you really like to do or see? Plan it out and make a list of things that would interest you.
Now you have a go.....	

SHEET 4 – Building respect

Fill in the answers to the following questions

A piece of work that you think you did very well	
Something nice that someone has said about you recently	
Something kind that you did for someone else	
Something new that you have learnt and gained confidence in	
Something funny you have done or said	
Two things you like about yourself	