

## Healthy Self Esteem For Young Children

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7/98

### Working with the Young Child: Ages 4 - 8

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Healthy self-esteem is something parents and caregivers think about and hear about. They probably hope that they are doing all the right things to help build a healthy self-esteem for their children.

Self-esteem is what we believe to be true about ourselves and what we are capable of doing. According to one authority (Branden, 1987), self-esteem has two components: a feeling of personal competence, which allows us to cope with life's challenges, and a feeling of personal worth or self-respect which encourages us to stand up for our interests and needs. In other words, self-esteem is the sum of self-confidence and self-respect. It reflects your judgment of your ability to cope with the challenges of your life (to understand and master your problems) and of your right to be happy (to respect and stand up for your interests and needs).

A healthy self-esteem is important because it provides the foundation for our ability to respond actively and positively to the opportunities of life—in work, in love, and in play. One of the greatest gifts an adult can give a child is helping that child build and maintain a healthy self-esteem.

### The Components of Self-Esteem

As a child grows and has more experiences, his or her inner picture of self expands. Experiences of the "physical self," the "thinking self," and the "social self" all help mold the child's self-image.

**Physical Self** ...involves the appearance and performance of a child's body. A child with successful physical-self experiences might make comments like these:

"I have such nice printing."

"I'm getting to be so good at jumping rope."

A child having unsuccessful physical experiences might say:

"I don't want to take my coat off."

"I'm too ugly."

**Thinking Self** ...involves what a child knows—the basic concepts in reading, writing, and math taught in school each day. Positive thinking self-image will produce statements like these:

"I'm such a smart boy."

"This math is easy."

"I learn fast."

"I like to read."

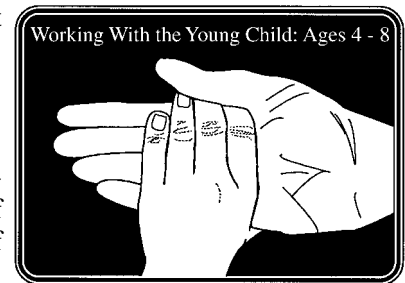
Experiences of failure for the thinking self produce these kinds of statements:

"I'm so dumb."

"Why can't I learn like everyone else?"

"I hate school; it's too hard."

"I don't want to read again."



**Social Self** ...involves a child's relationships with others—family members, classmates, peers, acquaintances, and so on. A child who feels good about his or her social experiences might say:

"I like being with my family."

"I sure have a lot of good friends."

A child whose social self is having negative experiences might say:

"Why do I have to go to school? Nobody likes me."

"There's never anyone to play with."

Positive experiences in each of the self image components enhance a child's total self-image; negative experiences diminish it.

Children's general feelings of self-worth are closely related to feelings of social competence and their feelings of physical competence.

So, how do children **gain** competence? Studies of families found certain factors are important in raising competent children.

Families of competent children:

- care about each other.
- reach out to each other.
- reach out with the expectation that this interaction will be positive.
- love and respect each other but each is free to be open and honest.
- value individual differences and consider many options for solving problems.
- are involved in community activities.

- have parents who respect each other as individuals and present models of leadership to children.
- have parents who negotiate problems when they arise.
- have a clear power structure.
- have family members who are encouraged to be individuals and who accept responsibility for their actions.
- have an understanding of each other and communicate feelings and ideas.

*These factors help develop competent children.*

## Resources:

Borba, Michelle and Craig, *Self-Esteem. A Classroom Affair*, Vol. 2, Harper-Collins Publishers; 1982.

Brooks, Jane B., *The Process of Parenting*. Mayfield Publishing Co., 1991.

*“Working with the Young Child: Ages 4–8” is a series of six bulletins authored by Arizona Cooperative Extension Family Task Force members. The bulletins cover the same major topics found in “Understanding Youth: Working with the Early Adolescent” curriculum, but address younger children.*

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## SELF-ESTEEM ENHANCING ACTIVITIES... For Parents and Children

Parents have a wonderful challenge and an opportunity to provide role models for their children as they help them “grow” self-esteem. A positive self-concept is encouraged when children feel they are competent and have the ability to do many things well. Preschool children learn through being active and learning about how they feel about their successes.

New skills can enhance their self-esteem. Parents enhance a child’s positive self-esteem when they provide positive support about their efforts. We’ve all heard the phrase “I love you But...” and invariably parents can’t resist following a compliment with a helpful suggestion for doing even better. **If what you truly want is to encourage your children and build their sense of worth and belonging, then let your smiles, thanks, and appreciations stand alone.** Remember, for preschoolers the process is most important, not the finished product.

Parents can teach self-esteem with some of the following fun activities taken from the DARE to be You Preschool Activity Guide. (DARE to be You Program, Colorado State University Cooperative Extension 4-H Youth Development).

### SUCCESS SHARING

Sit in a circle or one on one with your child. Roll the ball to the child and have them say their name and say one thing about themselves, i.e. favorite color, book, toy, or something they learned to do. Help them to focus on something they like about themselves or something they learned to do that day.

### THUMBS UP, THUMBS DOWN

Children are able to develop and model rules for conduct and choose behaviors they think are appropriate.

Puppets (dolls or stuffed animals) are used to create situations. Have the puppets “break” a few rules you choose as important. For instance, hit each other, run, scream, and throw toys. Also, have puppets demonstrate the acceptable behavior. For instance, share a toy, read, play quietly with a friend, and show empathy for a hurt friend. Mix up positive and negative examples.

Explain that some of the puppets acted in a way that made it easy for them to get along with others and have a good time. Some of the puppets created problems.

Have them go through the examples shared and give a “thumbs up” for those behaviors that you think help them get along with others and a “thumbs down” for those behaviors that might cause problems. Ask the child(ren) why certain behaviors are “thumbs up” or “thumbs down;” what are some ways to stop the “thumbs down” behaviors. This leads to discussions of self-responsibility or personal power.

### MY WINGS GROW POWERFUL

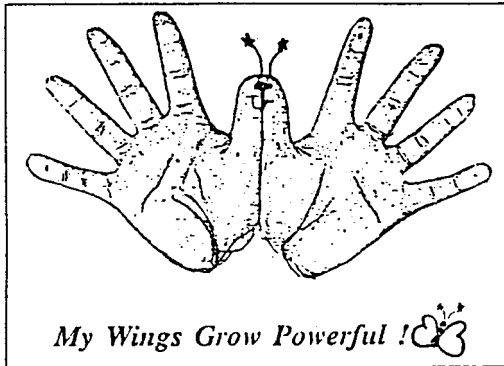
*Let’s talk about power. What is power? Do you think children have any power? Have you ever felt powerful? Does personal power have anything to do with how tall you are or how big your muscles are? Everyone has personal power no matter what their size. Personal power is our power to decide to do something or not to do it. Who do you think of when you think of a powerful person?*

Children may bring up powerful contemporary figure like Power Rangers, Ninja Turtles, etc. Help to point out to them that the character’s real power is its compassion--helping people in trouble.

Tell or read the story, “Goldie Locks and the Three Bears.” *What about “Goldie Locks and the Three Bears”? Does Goldie Locks use her personal power in a bad way or a good way? What could Goldie Locks do to use her personal power in a good way?*

*Personal power can be used in good ways. It helps us use words when we are mad--instead of hitting. It helps us settle down when Mom asks us to. Personal power even helps us tell friends, teachers, other adults and children how we feel. It helps Goldie Locks know that the "food" did not make her go into the bears' house. She had the power to choose what to do, and she used her own personal power.*

## FINGERPAINT POWER



Another hands-on experience to strengthen personal power is to create a MY WINGS GROW POWERFUL sheet with sticky stars (see picture). Apply finger paint to a slightly damp sponge. Using the sponge, cover palms and fingers with the finger paint. Have the thumbs and wrist of the hands meet and the fingers point outward creating a butterfly effect. Put "personal power stars" at the end of the antenna of the butterfly. Have the child tell you a time or times when they used their personal power. Write these on the wing tips of the butterfly. As you write, read the words back to the child.

## MAKE WARM FUZZIES

You'll need various colors of yarn, poster board or thin cardboard (cut in 2" x 2" squares or circles), scissors, glue and a Warm Fuzzy poster (poster board with caption "Warm Fuzzies").

Give child this 2" x 2" square or circle. Show your child how to wrap yarn loosely around the cardboard about 10 to 20 loops. Tie at top of cardboard and cut end loops. Talk about how nice and warm the yarn feels as making the warm fuzzies.

*When someone treats us nice or praises us, we say they are giving us a warm fuzzy.*

Ask each child what a warm fuzzy is. Hugs and stars are examples of warm fuzzies. Write the examples of warm fuzzies on the Warm Fuzzy poster board. Tell each child that they can give the warm fuzzy to themselves or give it to someone else.

*It is important to give ourselves warm fuzzies as well as give and accept them from others.*

## DYNA'S M & M GAME

Puppets can help children notice characteristics they like about themselves. Here is a skit that involves puppets and M & M's to illustrate this.

**NARRATOR:** One day at Dyna's school, the teacher, Mrs. Stega, taught the childosaurs a new game called the M & M Game.

**Mrs. Stega says to Dyna:** I think you are all such m-m-m good childosaurs, but sometimes we forget to notice all the wonderful things about ourselves. So, today we will play a game that will help us notice and tell others how mm-mm good we really are.

**Mrs. Stega (to audience):** I would like each of you to play this game with Dyna and her friends. I would like all of you to close your eyes for just a minute and think of something you can do well. Think of something you do well outside in the sandbox or at home with your mom or dad. Do you have a game that you play well? I have noticed that you are all good listeners. Open your eyes now. Raise your hand when you have something to share with the group.

**Dyna (raising her hand):** I am really good at making sand castles, probably the highest sand castles ever.

**Mrs. Stega:** I have noticed, Dyna, you are a great sand castle builder. Now you may reach into this cup and pick out a mm-mm good treat for noticing something mm-mm good about yourself.

Encourage your child to follow Dyna's example. Ask what they like about their physical selves. Have the puppet model this incorrectly by saying he likes his new t-shirt. Explain that a shirt is not a part of you and go on from here. Have Dyna give a correct example, *I have a pretty tail.*

It feels good when you say something nice about yourself and when others know what you do well. It is as good as getting a mm-mm treat — like a piece of candy — or better.

Was it easy for you to think of good things to say about yourself? Is it always easy?

How does it feel to tell nice things about yourself?

What do you tell others about — things you like or things you don't like about yourself?

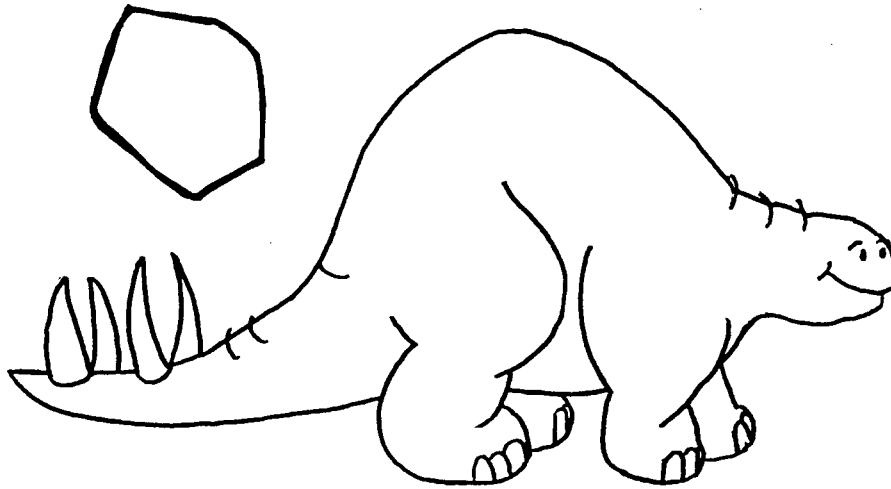
Let's all try to remember this game and how mm-mm good it feels to tell others about what we do best.

## PROTECTIVE ARMOR

Developing a positive self-image helps children protect themselves from substance and other personal abuses. Parents can enhance building a protective armor through the use of encouragement, compliments and positive talk with their children.

A glue stick and the PROTECTIVE ARMOR pattern is needed. Cut out and glue dinosaurs to construction paper. Cut out plates from various colored construction paper. Discuss with your child that the best protection from substance abuse and other personal abuses is to develop a positive self concept. For young children this message comes mainly from external sources. Children tend to believe they are what their parents or teachers say they are, so it is vital to give positive feedback. Practice as a parent giving many positives during the week.

On the "protective armor" plates tell one or two positives you as a parent noticed. Each time your child does something you appreciate, encourage that action and add a plate or armor to the dinosaur's back. Write on the plate: "Joe is a great table setter" or "Joe gives the best hugs".



## KIND WORDS HELP US GROW

Use the KIND WORDS worksheet and 1 1/4" diameter light-colored round stickers (about six). Fold up the bottom edge of the worksheet on the dotted line and staple the ends. This creates a pouch to store the stickers. Discuss the importance of using encouragement with your child as he learns to accomplish the new things he learns.

*Encouragement focuses on the process while praise focuses on the finished product.*

Both are important, but encouragement is especially valuable to help children strive. As a parent, think of a specific positive action or attribute that was noticed lately about your child. Write it on a flower petal (sticker). Read this positive action or attribute to your child and place the petal on the flower. Encourage your child to compliment himself. Place this flower on a wall or the refrigerator and continue to add petals as the child practices encouragement and praise throughout the week.

