

ABOUT SELF-ESTEEM

Self-esteem — self-confidence — pride in one’s abilities — a positive self-concept -- no matter what it is called, it is definitely important. It is important to babies and young children. It is important to parents and grandparents. In fact, we never outgrow our need for that essential good feeling about ourselves that serves as the bedrock of a healthy, happy existence.

Self-esteem is especially important to the adolescent. It is crucial that the emerging young adult, in the process of developing a coherent identity, sees himself as capable and loveable. He needs to feel that he is basically a good person, with lots of abilities and competencies, and that others like having him around.

Self-esteem means that you are accessible to yourself, that you can be relied upon by yourself no matter what, that even when life gets a little tricky, you have enough regard for your judgment and “know how” that you honestly believe you can figure out what you need to do in a given situation.

From an adolescent’s point of view, there are six key contributors to self-esteem:

1. ***Unconditional love of parents*** - Parents might not always like what you do or say, but they love you unconditionally -- no ifs, ands or buts about it.
2. ***Success in school*** - This does not mean making all or even any A’s. It means that you are trying and achieving well in some aspects of your school experience and that you do not dread getting up and going to school in the morning.
3. ***Having friends*** - Being part of a social group, a team, a club, an activity, a hobby or interest aggregation — anything that causes you to know there are other people like you who care whether or not you are around — is important. So is having one or two special best friends to share with.
4. ***Ability to make or do something in the “real world”*** - Everybody needs to be able to do something really well — well enough that somebody will hire you to do it (as in a job) or appreciate your services (as in volunteer work) or acknowledge your talents (like dancing or map reading or teaching a little kid to ride a bike).
5. ***Caring for someone or something in a responsible way*** - This means caring enough about someone else that you spend time being responsible for him/her in some way; for example, regularly taking your grandmother grocery shopping, baby sitting, walking the family dog every evening or coaching the little league team on Saturdays.
6. ***Capacity to envision oneself into the future*** - Being able to dream about how you want your life to be and the willingness to give it some serious thought, is a first step to having the kind of life you want.

Adolescents who have these six elements in their lives almost always have high esteem. They feel good about themselves and their potential even if they occasionally goof up or do something they later wish they had not. With positive self-esteem, they can look at their little failures as learning experiences, not devastating proof of how awful they are. By and large, young people who have strong self-esteem do not have to prove themselves by taking destructive risks with alcohol, drugs, driving or sex. Their sense of self, now in the future, is too important to them.