



## Self-esteem

### About self-esteem

Self-esteem is how a person feels about themselves. Someone with positive self-esteem will generally approach things thinking they are a good person who deserves love and support and can succeed in life. Someone with low or negative self-esteem will generally think they are not good at things, don't deserve love or support and that situations will work out badly for them.

The pressures of modern life for children and young people are having a real impact on their self-esteem; social media, cyberbullying, bullying, body-image, early sexualisation, academic expectations, student debt, family problems, abuse, gang culture and global anxiety are just some of the difficult things that young people are trying to grapple with.

### Children and young people with high self-esteem:

- Have a positive image of themselves
- Are confident
- Can make friends easily and are not anxious with new people
- Can play in groups or on their own
- Will try and solve problems on their own, but if not able to will ask for help
- Can be proud of their achievements
- Can admit mistakes and learn from them
- Will try new things and adapt to change

### Children and young people with low self-esteem:

- Have a negative image of themselves and may feel bad, ugly, unlikeable or stupid
- Lack confidence
- Find it hard to make and keep friendships, and may feel victimised by others
- Feel lonely and isolated
- Tend to avoid new things and find change hard
- Can't deal well with failure.
- Tend to put themselves down and might say things like "I'm stupid" or "I can't do that" (before they have tried)
- Are not proud of what they achieve and always think they could have done better
- Are constantly comparing themselves to their peers in a negative way

Most children will have dips in self-esteem as they go through different stages or challenges in life. Starting a new school, moving house, changes in the family and many other factors can affect a child's confidence, but with support from parents and other adults they usually get through this.

However, some children seem to have low self-esteem from an early age. This may be partly down to their personalities or they may have had an unsettled time as a baby or toddler.

Other children develop low self-esteem following a difficult time such as divorce, bereavement or being bullied or abused, and can't bounce back.

Teenagers with low self-esteem can find it very hard to cope with pressures from school, peers and society.

Children and young people with low self-esteem are more at risk of developing depression, anxiety, self-harming and other mental health problems as they grow up, and will often find the ups and downs of life in general harder to get through.

## Resilience and self-esteem

Resilience is being able to deal with the ups and downs of life, and is key to raising self-esteem. There are a lot of different factors that determine whether a young person is able to cope well, or not so well, when times are tough. Being able to 'bounce back' is more likely when a child:

- Has had secure early attachments
- Has a clear sense of identity
- Communicates well with others
- Can set goals and try to meet them
- Understands how to go about solving problems
- Is able to think and act independently
- Is able to manage sometimes negative thoughts and feelings, and move on from them
- Is loved and valued by family and friends

## What can help? What to do next

These are some things that may really make a difference:

1. If you think your child has low self-esteem, find ways that you and others around them can try and boost their confidence.
2. Show them lots of love and be positive about them as a person – tell them what makes them special to you.
3. Set an example of having a positive attitude when faced with challenges.
4. Let them know you value effort rather than perfection. Children can miss out on lots because they don't try due to their anxiety about not 'succeeding'.
5. Encourage them to try new challenges themselves, and celebrate them for it. Phrases like "Well done, that was hard, and you managed it" are good. Make the steps small at first, then increase the challenges.
6. They could set goals and make plans for things they'd like to accomplish. Keeping track builds good feelings about each milestone achieved.
7. Let them know they should take pride in their opinions and ideas and not to be afraid to voice them. It's ok when people disagree, we all see things differently.
8. Give praise for their successes, and don't focus on areas where they have not done so well.
9. Reassure them it's OK to make mistakes and that it's all part of life. Getting it wrong is not the end of the world and happens to everyone.
10. Don't be too critical and don't put them down – if you are unhappy with their behaviour, say this but make clear that you still love them.
11. Acknowledge their feelings and help them express their feelings in words. For example, encourage them to say, "I'm upset because..." or "I feel happy when..."
12. Encourage them to face down the way they criticise themselves; change the niggling, negative little inner voice into positive thoughts.
13. Focus on what goes well. Get them into the habit of saying or writing down three good things that went well that day.
14. Use creativity to help the child express themselves – art, drama, music
15. Help children discover and develop their talents, through clubs, groups and activities. Finding something they are good at provides a huge boost to their feelings of self-worth.
16. Get them involved with community projects that make a difference to someone else to develop a more positive opinion of themselves.
17. Get them outside, get them active, get them healthy.
18. Allocate 20 minutes each day to chat, laugh, do something together, have fun #Take20 [www.youngminds.org.uk/take20/](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/take20/)
19. Make sure your child's school is aware they are struggling with self-esteem – many have mentoring or buddying schemes.
20. If you are worried your child's low self-esteem is affecting their day to day life, relationships or ability to learn and develop, it is worth seeking professional help. You can talk to their GP. You can go without the child if they do not want to come. It can be helpful to write down what makes you think your child has low self-esteem, and anything you think might be causing it.

# Finding support

All resources listed on this sheet are for information only. While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, YoungMinds cannot accept responsibility for changes to details made by other organisations.

<p><b>YoungMinds</b></p> <p><b>Starting a conversation with your child</b> <a href="http://www.youngminds.org.uk/take20">www.youngminds.org.uk/take20</a> Ideas to help parents create a relaxed space in which to talk by taking 20 minutes to do an activity with their child. You can find fun activity ideas, conversation starters and advice.</p>	<p><b>Relate</b> <a href="http://www.relate.org.uk">www.relate.org.uk</a> Online information about young people's mental health. You can find advice on building self esteem in teenagers at <a href="http://www.relate.org.uk/relationship-help/help-family-life-and-parenting/parenting-teenagers/mental-health/self-esteem">www.relate.org.uk/relationship-help/help-family-life-and-parenting/parenting-teenagers/mental-health/self-esteem</a></p>
<p><b>NHS Choices</b> <a href="http://www.nhs.uk">www.nhs.uk</a> Information and practical strategies for building self-esteem <a href="http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/raising-low-self-esteem">www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/raising-low-self-esteem</a></p>	<p><b>The Mix</b> <a href="http://www.themix.org.uk">www.themix.org.uk</a> If you're under 25 you can talk to The Mix about anything that's troubling you over the phone, email or webchat. You can also use their phone or online counselling service.</p> <p>Helpline open daily 4-11pm: 0808 808 4994</p> <p>Email: <a href="http://www.themix.org.uk/get-support/speak-to-our-team/email-us">www.themix.org.uk/get-support/speak-to-our-team/email-us</a></p> <p>Webchat open daily 4-11pm: <a href="http://www.themix.org.uk/get-support/speak-to-our-team">www.themix.org.uk/get-support/speak-to-our-team</a></p> <p>Counselling service: <a href="http://www.themix.org.uk/get-support/speak-to-our-team/the-mix-counselling-service">www.themix.org.uk/get-support/speak-to-our-team/the-mix-counselling-service</a></p>
<p><b>Childline</b> <a href="http://www.childline.org.uk">www.childline.org.uk</a> If you're under 19 you can confidentially call, chat online or email about any problem big or small.</p> <p>24/7 helpline: 0800 1111</p> <p>Chat 1:1 with an online counsellor: <a href="http://www.childline.org.uk/get-support/1-2-1-counsellor-chat">www.childline.org.uk/get-support/1-2-1-counsellor-chat</a></p> <p>Email: Sign up on the website, so you can send your message without needing to use your name or email address, at <a href="http://www.childline.org.uk/registration">www.childline.org.uk/registration</a></p>	<p><b>Youth Wellbeing Directory</b> <a href="http://www.annafreud.org/on-my-mind/youth-wellbeing">www.annafreud.org/on-my-mind/youth-wellbeing</a> List of local services for young people's mental health and wellbeing.</p> <p><b>Youth Access</b> <a href="http://www.youthaccess.org.uk">www.youthaccess.org.uk</a> information about local advice and counselling services for young people.</p>
<p><b>Finding a private counsellor or therapist</b> If your child needs more in-depth emotional support and this is an affordable option for you, you can find accredited private child and adolescent therapists and counsellors living locally to you by searching the following directories.</p> <p>Counselling directory: <a href="http://www.counselling-directory.org.uk">www.counselling-directory.org.uk</a></p> <p>BACP: <a href="http://www.bacp.co.uk/search/Therapists">www.bacp.co.uk/search/Therapists</a></p> <p>UKCP: <a href="http://www.psychotherapy.org.uk/find-a-therapist">www.psychotherapy.org.uk/find-a-therapist</a></p>	<p><b>YoungMinds Crisis Messenger</b> Provides free, 24/7 text support for young people experiencing a mental health crisis.</p> <p>Text YM to 85258</p> <p>Texts are free from EE, O2, Vodafone, 3, Virgin Mobile, BT Mobile, GiffGaff, Tesco Mobile and Telecom Plus.</p>