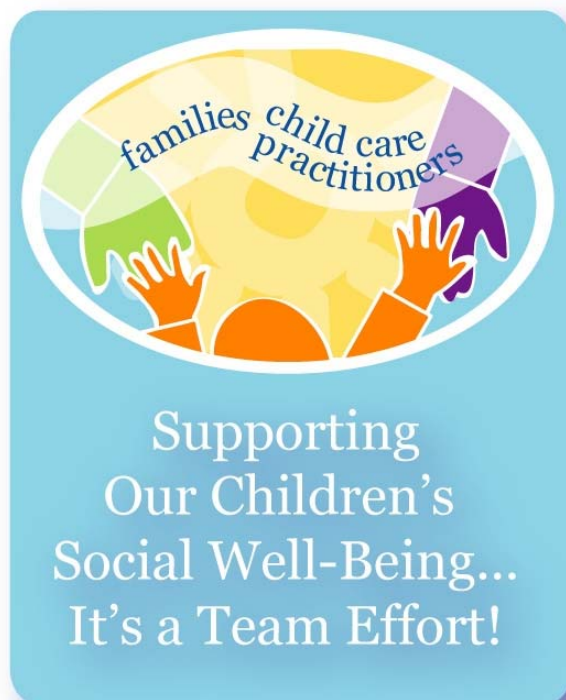


Workshop

Practitioners and Families Together: Self-Esteem



Produced by the Canadian Child Care Federation



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**Free full-colour posters
to everyone who hosts a workshop
and submits evaluation forms**

Return forms by fax or mail to:
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Facilitator Information

Focus

- What is self-esteem and why is it important?
- How can practitioners and families work together to support healthy self-esteem?

Materials

- Flip chart or whiteboard
- Markers
- Small size sticky notes
- Pens or pencils for each participant

Overview

This 90 minute workshop is built around two activities: the first helps to illustrate the nature of self-esteem while the second addresses ways to support self-esteem.

Background Information

What is self-esteem?

Our self-esteem is a reflection of our judgment of our own worth. It is usually seen as an enduring characteristic, although there will normally be ups and downs in the daily course of life. Self-esteem can be general or it can apply to a particular characteristic. A healthy self-esteem can be seen as revolving around three beliefs, "I am capable," "I am lovable" and "I belong."

Many people confuse self-esteem with narcissism or an overly inflated sense of self-importance. In fact, healthy self-esteem is quite the opposite. It is a quiet sense of confidence that sustains us through difficult times.

Alexander (2001) identifies the following characteristics of healthy self-esteem: knowing and accepting who we are, knowing what we are capable of doing, having a sense of purpose in life, being able to take action to achieve our goals in life, feeling the sense of satisfaction that comes from being absorbed in a task, trusting ourselves and others, feeling comfortable in our surroundings, feeling included and having a sense of integrity.

Where does self-esteem come from?

Self-esteem develops and evolves throughout our lives as a result of our interactions with others and with our environment. However, experiences during early childhood are particularly strong influences on self-esteem. During these developmentally important years, the significant adults in our lives are our primary sources of self-esteem and their response to us tells us whether or not we are worthy, capable people. Young children who are treated with affection, genuinely listened to, and spoken to respectfully are more likely to have a healthy self-esteem than children who are consistently being criticized or ignored.

Our self-esteem is enhanced when we undertake challenging tasks and are successful; that is, when we have a sense of accomplishment. However, failing at those tasks doesn't necessarily undermine self-esteem. That only happens when we receive messages that failing to be successful means that we have failed as people.

Believing that we "belong," that is, that we are valued members of a group, is also important to self-esteem. This is true for everyone but even more so in cultures where the family and community is considered to be more important than the individual; for example, in Aboriginal and Asian cultures.

The significance of self-esteem

Children with healthy self-esteem tend to be willing to undertake realistic challenges, able to learn from their successes and failures, and able to treat themselves and others with respect. In general, they are optimistic; for example, they see challenges as problems to be solved or temporary setbacks rather than as a sign that they are incompetent. They have confidence that they can take action to make a positive difference.

Unhealthy self-esteem is associated with a sense of pessimism. Children with low self-esteem tend to expect failure and to blame their lack of success on their own inadequacies. Their lack of confidence in themselves is reflected in their relationships with others so they are often very vulnerable to peer influence. Unhealthy self-esteem has been linked to stress, loneliness, anxiety and vulnerability to depression. It can stand in the way of academic and job performance and may be related to drug and alcohol abuse and other kinds of self-destructive behaviour.

Because we tend to act in ways that fit with our feelings about ourselves, self-esteem becomes a self-perpetuating cycle. If we feel that we can be successful, we are more likely to try new things and more likely to experience success. Even if we fail, we are able to learn from our failure and to persevere until we are successful. This reinforces our image of ourselves as persons who can take action to bring about positive results. On the other hand, if we believe that we are likely to fail at the tasks we undertake, we may give up easily or not try at all. This means that we will have fewer opportunities to succeed. Our lack of success tells us that we are incapable and inadequate so we are less likely to try in the future.

How can we support children's self-esteem?

We support children's healthy self-esteem by:

- Giving them opportunities to succeed at meaningful tasks. Children need to believe that the tasks they accomplish are genuinely valued by the important adults in their lives and by their peers.
- Avoiding false praise as children are quick to realize when they are being patronized or manipulated.
- Emphasizing the importance of effort in resolving problems.
- Focusing on group, rather than individual, activities and achievements.
- Listening attentively to children so they know that their opinions and experiences matter.

- Letting them know that we care about them even when we don't approve of their actions.
- Helping them feel connected to their culture and community: including them in community events, making time for them to be with elders and other community members, exposing them to traditional practices and beliefs, supporting their use of their home language, ensuring that they "see" themselves and their families reflected in the playroom environment and activities.

Influences on self-esteem

Our self-esteem is not the sum of who we are. Our personality, temperament and abilities all influence how we approach life and therefore the kinds of interactions we have. As well, the extent to which we possess or achieve the behaviours, characteristics and accomplishments which are valued in our culture will influence our sense of our own worth. For example, a quality such as shyness might be valued in one culture but considered a liability in another, so a child who is shy will receive different messages about herself in one culture than she would in another. In a similar way, gender is a factor in self-esteem because traits and behaviours that are valued in one gender may not be valued in another.

Suggestions

- This workshop is intended for groups of parents, of practitioners, or of parents and practitioners together. The time allotments are approximate and should be adjusted to fit with the needs and interests of the participants.
- The facilitator should be aware of possible cultural differences regarding self-esteem. Participants can be invited to discuss the characteristics and abilities that are valued in their culture and the implications these have for supporting children's self-esteem.
- The facilitator should be prepared to respond to misconceptions about self-esteem, particularly the idea that attempts to build self-esteem result in self-

centered children who have unrealistic views of themselves. This perception arises from a failure to understand that healthy self-esteem is associated with meaningful accomplishments and accurate self-appraisals.

- The workshop asks participants to draw upon their early memories, which can be a painful experience for some. The facilitator may wish to acknowledge this and to mention that the people they will recall in the exercise are the ones who have helped them develop the resiliency to overcome a difficult beginning.

The Workshop

Welcome and Introduction (5 minutes)

Objectives

- What is self-esteem and why is it important?
- How can we work together to support children's healthy self-esteem?



Shared Experience: Our goals for children (5 minutes)

Introduce topic by asking participants to write some of their goals for children on individual stickies and post them in a designated spot.

Debrief and theory: (15-20 minutes)

Review the words that have been posted and point out some similarities. (e.g. "Many of us agree that we would like our children to learn to be kind.") Use the words on the stickies to introduce and define self-esteem. For example, many parents and practitioners would like children to learn to be responsible, and this characteristic is related to self-esteem in the sense that children who have healthy self-esteem feel that they can take initiative and make a difference. Some may say that they would like children to learn to be respectful of others. Children who have a healthy self-esteem respect themselves so are able to respect others. If they feel like they are a worthwhile part of a community, they feel a responsibility to behave in a way that is acceptable to the community; for example, showing respect for elders.

This is a good time to mention that some of the goals for children will be ones that we can't do a lot about ("A child who is tone deaf will never be a famous musician.") but others are related to self-esteem ("I am worthwhile," "I am capable," "I belong") and there are many things we can do to work toward those goals.

Shared Experience: Supporting Self-Esteem (15-25 minutes)

Ask participants to recall a person they spent time with as a child who made them feel good about themselves. Give them a few minutes to think then ask:

- What are some words that describe how you felt when you were with this person?
- What are some words that describe this person?
- How would you describe your relationship with this person?

If the group is small or time is limited, debrief this exercise in the whole group. However, if time permits, divide participants into pairs or small groups and ask them each to tell the others about the person they remembered. Ask them to discuss and make a list, based on their own experiences, of characteristics and actions of persons who help children feel good about themselves.

Debrief and theory (15 minutes)

Ask, "What does this tell us about how we can support children's healthy self-esteem?" Guide the discussion to include such points as listening to children, involving them in meaningful activities, avoiding empty praise, supporting cultural roots etc.

Implications for Application (15 minutes)

In a group of parents and practitioners, ask "What are some ways we can work together to support children's healthy self-esteem?" (e.g. sharing information about children's lives at home and at child care in order to respond to and build upon their interests, "Ben was so excited when he...")

In a group composed solely of parents, ask "What kinds of information and support can we give the child care centre to help the staff support our children's self-esteem?" (e.g. sharing information about children's activities, interests and responses to events; providing cultural information and artifacts to enable practitioners to create an environment that reflects a child's culture.)

In a group of practitioners, discuss ways that practitioners can support families in understanding and enhancing their children's self-esteem. (e.g. sharing information about children's activities, interests and responses, using posters or workshops to help families understand self-esteem.)

Commitment *(5 minutes)*

Ask participants to commit to one thing that they will do differently in the coming week as a result of the workshop. They should write this on a piece of paper and take it home as a reminder. Practitioners might choose to do this as a group, planning for a change they will make in their program.

Evaluation/Feedback *(5 minutes)*

Evaluation forms are included. Please ask participants to complete these at the end of the session and to put them in an envelope placed somewhere in the room. Responses are intended to be anonymous.

Possible Extensions

In longer workshops or in separate ones, participants could explore the role of listening in self-esteem or practice giving meaningful feedback to children.

Listening/Not-Listening

1. Ask participants to divide into pairs and to spend a few minutes chatting with their partner. You may need to suggest a topic; for example, "Something interesting that happened to you this week." After 2 or 3 minutes, ask them to stop talking. (Give an advance warning to allow them to finish their conversations.) Debrief by asking, "What things did your partner do that let you know she/he was listening to you?" List on whiteboard or flipchart. (Include verbal and nonverbal responses.)

2. Direct participants to stay in pairs. This time, one partner will talk and the other will **not** listen. Each person will have a chance to be the speaker and will talk for 1 minute. It will require some encouragement and humour to keep the speaker talking for one minute while his or her partner looks around the room, writes, talks with someone else etc. When each person has had a chance to be the speaker and the "non-listener", ask the group these questions and record their responses on a whiteboard or flipchart:
 - a. What were some of the feelings you had while you were speaking and not being listened to? (e.g. frustration, worthlessness, discouragement)
 - b. What were you thinking? (e.g. "I want to stop talking.")
 - c. What did you do? (e.g. talking louder, moving to make eye contact)
3. Point out the connections between their feelings, thoughts and actions and the feelings, thoughts and actions associated with low self-esteem. This helps to illustrate how important listening is to self-esteem.
4. Ask participants to recall times that they have really listened to children and think about how the children responded. Then ask them to think about times when they haven't been able to listen well to children and how the children responded. (e.g. turning the adult's face to theirs, acting out to get attention, giving up)
5. Discuss ways to really listen to children (e.g. kneeling or sitting at children's level, waiting patiently and really focusing while they are talking, making eye contact, clarifying to be sure we understand)
6. Participants could be asked to commit to a goal to focus on in the next week with respect to listening to children.

Encouraging Children

The following short YouTube video accurately reflects current research on praising children and can be an excellent discussion starter for a short workshop on providing meaningful feedback to children:

Greater Good Science Centre. YouTube: How to praise children. *Half Full: Science for Raising Happy Kids*. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wqo4c-FIFGE>

Ask participants to discuss whether the following scenarios show "good praise" (encouragement) or "bad praise." As the discussion proceeds, compile a list of principles for encouraging children.

- Four year old Elsie runs to her mother with her painting and says, "Do you like my picture?" Her mother takes the picture and looks at it for a moment, "I'm noticing that you did something different with this painting. Did you use some sparkle glue over here? It's so shiny."
- When Evan comes to the playroom, he usually goes right to the puzzle corner. This morning there is a new puzzle. It's far too easy for him but he puts it together quickly and calls, "Teacher, look at my puzzle." The practitioner glances quickly in his direction and says, "That's nice, Evan. You're really good at puzzles."
- Tyler has been working for at least 15 minutes to make the train track but it still won't connect at one end of the bridge. The practitioner kneels down beside him at the train table and says, "You've been working really hard at getting that train track together, Tyler. What are some of the ways you've tried?"
- Three year old Liam seldom helps with cleanup but today he picks up all of the blocks. The adult says, "Wow, Liam! We'll be able to go outside a lot earlier because you cleaned up those blocks so quickly."

- .When William has his outdoor clothes on the teacher says, "William, you're the first one ready again. Children, I wish you could all get dressed as quickly as William."
- An observer notices that the practitioner says "Good work" at least 20 times in the hour.

The list that is compiled might show the following characteristics of encouraging responses:

- They are meaningful and honest.
- They are descriptive.
- They are specific ("You used three different sizes of blocks to make the ramp").
- They focus on process rather than results.
- They never compare children with one another.
- They emphasize that we learn through mistakes.
- They point out the consequences of children's positive behaviours.
- They avoid judgments.
- They are given in private.

Participants could go on to create some typical scenarios and use them to practice encouraging responses.

Resources

Branden, N. (1994), *Six pillars of self-esteem*. New York: Bantam.

Brooker, L. and Woodhead, M. (Eds.) (2008) *Developing positive identities: Diversity and young children*. Retrieved May 13, 2008 from http://www.bernardvanleer.org/publication_store/publication_store_publications/developing_positive_identities_diversity_and_young_children/file

Developing your child's self-esteem.

http://www.kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/feelings/self_esteem.html

Faber, A. and Mazlish, E. (1999). *How to talk so kids will listen and listen so kids will talk*. New York: Avon Books. (Revised edition).

Greater Good Science Centre. YouTube: How to praise children. *Half Full: Science for Raising Happy Kids*. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wqo4c-FIFGE>

The story on self-esteem

http://www.kidshealth.org/kid/feeling/emotion/self_esteem.html

National Network on Child Care. (1993) *Can you praise children too much?*
Reprinted from M. Lopes (Ed.) *CareGiver News* (August, p. 1).
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Alexander, T. (2001). Defining self-esteem. What is self-esteem and why does it matter? Self-esteem as an aid to understanding and recovery. *Mental Healthcare*, Vol. 4, No 10, pp. 332-33