

Improving self-esteem – HRI

Raising self-esteem takes time and patience. In particular, children/young people need to:

Hear - the positive strokes - many youngsters with low self esteem will not be tuned in to the positive strokes being offered - establishing eye contact can be helpful here

Receive - for children with low self-esteem they will often reject the positive strokes - 'She doesn't really mean that';

Internalise - this will be a gradual process as the youngster is invited to rewrite his perception of himself

Below are some suggestions for effectively communicating positive strokes:

- Using 'I' statements makes it harder for children to reject the positives being given. Contrast 'Well done', 'Great' etc with 'I like the way you've tidied everything off your floor.' What I'm saying here is that *in my opinion*, you've done a great job – it's my opinion.
- Be specific about what you are pleased with - 'I'm proud of how well you've set out your homework – look how you've taken care with your writing.'
- Avoid the temptation to give too many positive strokes as they are likely to be rejected. Give your child time to get more and more used to receiving positive strokes.
- Encourage your child to accept themselves for who they are – that they aren't perfect and never will be. Help them to know that you don't expect perfection.
- Linked with this, give them permission to fail. Model yourself that 'it's ok to make mistakes'. If you make a mistake, it might be a good opportunity for them to know you have – and that that's ok.
- Challenge 'I must' and 'I should' statements made by the child.
- Use scaling. This is a simple yet powerful way to help focus you and your child on their strengths:

Imagine a scale of 1-10 where 10 is the best things can be and 1 is the complete opposite.

1 _____ 10

Whatever the particular problem, rate where things are on the scale. Spend time assuring your child that you care about it – 'that must be tough' etc etc. Then focus your conversation on:

- a) what's happening that means it's not at '1' – really dig around and be specific about the things that are either going well or well enough.
- b) What needs to be done to shift it up the scale a bit? Where would they like to aim to be in the next week or so? 'What will you be doing when it shifts up to '5'. 'What will you be doing even more of what you're already doing'.

Check out <https://www.behaviourwall.com/dev/resources/solution-focused.php> for more information about this. Although written for schools, it applies just as well to the home.

Using Affirmations to Improve Self-Esteem

The Cycle of Development model gives some useful messages or affirmations that parents and carers can pass onto their children to help build their self-esteem. These include:

“You can learn to think for yourself and others too.”

“You can be yourself and we will still care for you.”

“You can explore who you are and find out about others.”

“You can be powerful and ask for help at the same time.”

“You can try out different ways of being powerful.”

“All of your feelings are OK here.”

“You can learn from your mistakes.”

The idea is *not* that you go around actually saying these messages – though one or two could be actually spoken. It’s more a case of thinking about the ways in which you share these messages with your child already – and thinking about perhaps one or two that could be passed on a bit more.