

Self-Esteem

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Children need support systems that help them to develop social interest. These might be developed by:

- ◆ Moving them toward assertiveness, purposiveness, a sense of self-responsibility, and a sense of control and power,
- ◆ Propelling them externally beyond the family in cooperative relationships with others.
- ◆ Encouraging their autonomy and self-confidence in reaching out to others in the community in a positive and meaningful manner,
- ◆ Developing their mutual emotional attachment with others, and
- ◆ Providing them with a sense of belonging or being connected.

Therefore, individuals experiencing these support characteristics will develop a strong self-confidence, a sense of control or high competence, self-assertiveness, self-responsibility, and a sense of purposiveness. As healthy human beings with high self-esteem, they tend to be well embedded or connected within their social environments. They tend to be socially active human beings, they tend to garnish much satisfaction from life, and through affiliation with other human beings, they tend to find peace of mind and happiness. Under these circumstances, they tend to internalize the concepts of resiliency.

The convictions people internalize about their values, worth, abilities, significant others, and the world around them becomes relatively fixed at an early age, about age 6 or 7. Then, people act as if these convictions are true and use them constantly for the rest of their lives. When these perceptions are distorted by physical punishment and nonsupport, children tend to see life as a global hostile force that is to be confronted. Self-images are reflections of perceptions of self, of others, and of the surrounding world; therefore, children interpret the reflective validation messages received through their private logic and assign a sense of worth, value, and power to self. When these reflective validations are negative, children suffer and often do not become productive individuals. The following factors tend to support positive self-esteem in children:

- Quality human interaction
- Group membership, sense of belonging
- Healthy early experiences
- Positive beliefs, attitudes, and values
- Wholesome and enjoyable school experiences
- Sense of cultural and social status
- Internal locus of control
- Sense of empowerment

- Secure self-images
- Psychological toughness
- Self-confidence
- Sense of self-competence
- Good health habits
- Self-regulating skills

When individuals are not the recipients of healthy parenting styles from their family or caretakers or from other support systems such as school, significant others, friends, peers, or communities, they often suffer from a lack of nurturing support, encouragement, communication, and positive reflective validations from others. When individuals perceive they are not respected, their freedom is restricted, and when no limits have been established as to appropriate and inappropriate behaviors, such persons decide for themselves what behaviors they will exhibit, often in destructive and irrational ways.

When the physical and emotional phenomenon of the bonding process is weak or nonexistent or is poor or inadequate between individuals and significant others in their environments, then destructive, revengeful, and criminal activities most likely become a reality for the individuals. Without the human bonding process, the ability to develop linkages with others in a cooperative, responsible, and meaningful manner is missing. Individuals do not possess the inner strength to develop strong social interests; thus, they will suffer low self-esteem and poor mental health. Harsh physical punishment tends to destroy the bonding process between parents or caretakers and children in their care. What can parents do to foster bonding? First, do not hit, and do as many of the following activities as frequently as possible:

- Communicate positive reflective validation and understanding and show respect.
- Acknowledge feelings; allow for touching and holding and reassure your children of your love.
- Encourage and illustrate socially appropriate behaviors.
- Show trust, faith, and belief in your children's strengths.
- Provide a helpful stance with problem-solving and coping strategies and be accepting when things do not go as planned.
- Devise strategies for changing attitudes from blaming, ostracizing, and condemning to self-responsibility and feelings of value and self-worth.
- Be there for your children; be available.
- Recapitulate the family and share its history and significance.
- Maintain a wholesome family atmosphere for healthy growth and exploration.