

DEVELOPING SELF-ESTEEM IN TEENAGERS

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The development of self-esteem, or the lack of it, began when the child was a baby. If the infant had its needs met in a timely manner and, as a toddler and pre-teen, he was given praise and was made to feel worthwhile, then in his teen years he stands a better chance of having a smoother ride. Parents often wonder why their child is shy, reticent, unkempt, surly, mean or doesn't have many friends. You could say, "That's because he's got that sort of personality!" While personality type plays a significant part, it shouldn't interfere with a child having a positive self-esteem.

Ensure that throughout your child's life they are affirmed, given open affection, and are assigned plenty of responsibility. Even if you find it difficult to catch your child in a praiseworthy moment, do it! Many parents make the mistake of causing their child to feel as if they are never quite good enough. If a child has the impression that he can never please his parents he will give up. You will more than likely have a rebellious teenager in your home. He will probably turn to a group of friends you won't like for his approval. Another possibility is that he may withdraw from everybody and become reclusive. This can be a very dangerous situation.

Some of these teenagers move into addictions or become depressed and sleep a lot. They may rarely venture far from their bedroom. They may become obnoxious or very difficult to motivate. Everything you ask them to do is greeted by a surly response. There is no bounce in their step or sparkle in their eyes. Others get into self-mutilation, become school dropouts, become dangerous to others or contemplate suicide. These are the children to be more concerned about. They may begin not to care or worry about what happens to them or to others (viz. Columbine).

Another reaction some teenagers have when they don't have a positive self-esteem is to become 'big-headed'. They talk about themselves constantly and brag. When nobody else is giving them praise they turn to self-adulation. One of my friends is was like that. His wife told me that he couldn't do anything right in his father's eyes. His older brother was his dad's favorite and his sister was daddy's darling girl. Chris also suffered from being the middle child. He had become an excellent singer and guitarist hoping to at least get some kudos from that, but it didn't gain him any points with his family. His self-obsession was pitiful and people found him obnoxious. It stemmed from his poor self-esteem.

A final reaction to having a poor self-esteem is to be a survivor and set out to prove that you are 'a somebody' even if the family doesn't think so. This category of child may excel in several arenas such as sport or the arts. They may get copious admiration from others, but all this glory is for the sake of hearing

you say, "Well done, son (daughter). I'm so proud of you!" Affirmation should naturally flow from a parent's lips. This is the substance of self-esteem.

The answer to having a smoother ride through your child's adolescence is to constantly encourage and praise him from an early age. It is never too late to start, but the sooner the better. Avoid thinking that he might become 'big-headed' if you praise him too much. My experience is that it is those who lack positive self-esteem that act that way. It's tough on a teenager making the transition from childhood to adulthood. He is looking to shape his identity and many things he does may not meet with your approval. However, if he has plenty of points in his 'positive bank' he can ride over many of the potholes ahead of him and you probably can, too. We all want a seamless transition.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.