



## CHAPTER 4

### Raising Self-Esteem

*Whatever you can do, or dream you can—begin it.*

*Boldness has genius, power and magic in it.*

**JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE**

**E**very day so many people hide who they truly are. As infants we have an intact sense of worth. We have had no reason to doubt it. Over the years your self-worth gets dented and bruised and we often feel that we are not quite as good as we could or should be. Sometimes these doubts take place in our inner silence; sometimes they spill over to the outside world. Take for example our youth in their formative years who often hide behind their appearance. Young people often believe that by looking and dressing a certain way they will be cool, accepted, and respected. They believe being thin, beautiful, wearing spiked hair, or sporting Nike shoes is their entrance into the club of being valuable. Then I will be worthy, they think. But self-esteem goes much deeper than how you look or whether you are keeping up with the latest trends.

## The Core Point ... and Your Gain

Self-esteem is an individual's personal evaluation of one's own worth as a human being. It indicates to what extent one considers oneself to be capable, important, successful, and valuable. Self-esteem results from the quality of relationships between a child and the messages received from the significant other persons in that child's life.

Having healthy self-esteem means a comprehensive and balanced view of and acceptance of self, knowing and embracing both strengths and weaknesses. We are not speaking about being boastful or arrogant. Boasting stems from an unbalanced and negative view of self (yes, negative!) blown into extreme proportions as a false front and form of self-defense. Although it seems paradoxical, boastful and arrogant people suffer from low self-esteem. They then try to compensate for it by proclaiming their worth to all who can hear in an attempt to claim it as truth for themselves.

The other extreme is never admitting success or a job well done. Always denying or playing down the things you do well. Don't do it! You are withholding acknowledgment and praise from yourself, as well as from others.

Believing in yourself, knowing that you are capable of achieving your goals, and accepting your weaknesses gives you the impetus to be grounded, fair, and positive in your dealings with yourself and with others.

Building and strengthening self-esteem is a broad subject. The focus here is on aspects that contribute to a healthy sense of self: self-concept/self-image, self-esteem, creating and using a positive attitude, the erroneousness of "mistakes," getting to know feelings, the role of acknowledgment, the power of the spoken word, listening, and self-esteem builders.

## Concept of Self

Your **self-image** is built through a variety of factors such as physical abilities; self-observation and comparison; your appearance; language abilities; verbal feedback from family, friends, and peers; and social integration and interaction (how others react to you). **Self-worth** is how valuable you see and feel yourself to be. It is an

inner sense of your own worth in the world and is created mainly through your relationship with yourself. **Self-esteem** is how valuable you feel you are to others and to the world at large. It is built and maintained in direct connection with others—parents, siblings, friends, students and teachers, and later partner and coworkers. It arises from how you believe to be valued by others.

How they treat you and what the quality of the relationships are that you have with them create, bit by bit, what you believe your value to be—to them, to yourself, and ultimately to the world in general. Self-worth and self-esteem are interwoven and interdependent. This crucial matrix of self-image, self-worth, and self-esteem has long lasting effects not only on how you value yourself, but also how you then value others, behave toward yourself and others, as well as greatly influencing what power you have and what direction you believe you can take in life.

Dr. Carl Rogers, renowned as the father of humanistic psychologist and person-centered therapy, established that our concept of self begins in early childhood and is heavily influenced by our parents (Rogers, 1977). For this reason, it is paramount that as parents you pay close attention to raising and maintaining a healthy concept of self in your children.

## **Self-Esteem**

*Self-worth supersedes all else. It is living the permission, the freedom, and the right to be who and how one really is.*

To hold persons in esteem is to hold them in high regard, to appreciate them and their worth. Learning to love yourself completely teaches you how to love others. Seeing and embracing your true nature—accepting the flaws, strengths, dreams, and fears—that make up who you are, allows you the generosity to understand others. They have different weaknesses and strengths than your own, but they have them just the same. There is no necessity to put on a good face, or try to be different or better than just how you are. By doing so, you can also accept others just as they are. This is not permission to act inconsiderately, thinking only of yourself and causing havoc when you find yourself in a stormy mood. On the contrary, it is the permission to

accept that the stormy mood is a part of you and no one else is responsible for it, nor should be punished by it. It is the grace of understanding that it is *only* a stormy mood and so it, too, shall pass. And you realize that this mood is only a small part of who you are and, relying on that, you may release it more easily. Understanding and loving yourself for all that you are, the wonder of yourself—as well as the parts you may name as bad, less, or not good enough—will gift you with the capacity to accept and love others for being who they are, and all that entails.

*Seeing and embracing your true nature, accepting the flaws, strengths, dreams, and fears that make up who you are, allows you the generosity to understand others.*

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Every child has the potential to be a powerful force of good in the world. If you, as the adult, empower your child to develop into that potential, you have given your child, yourself, and the world you live in a gift beyond

measure—a positive person believing in and doing good for themselves and others. In order to nurture this natural unfoldment of personal worth in children it is essential that you, as a parent and educator, first examine your own sense of self-worth.

As a parent I can ask myself:

- Do I, myself, have positive self-esteem?
- Do I accept, love, and embrace myself just as I am?
- Can I look at myself, my weaknesses and strengths, and love the whole that they create?
- Do I recognize my accomplishments and failures equally?
- Will I work at adopting this approach, although it may be unfamiliar to me?

What you as a parent can do, for your own betterment and for the betterment of the children, is to practice building healthy self-esteem for yourself first. Only when you begin on this path yourself can you accept and express authentic acknowledgment for others. You teach self-esteem, then, first by example.

<b>Traits of Children with High Self-Esteem</b>	<b>Traits of Children with Low Self-Esteem</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cooperative, team players</li> <li>• See self as source of successes</li> <li>• Creative problem solvers</li> <li>• Open for input</li> <li>• Set own standards</li> <li>• Have many friends</li> <li>• Responsible</li> <li>• Know strengths and weaknesses</li> <li>• Have leadership skills</li> <li>• Proud of accomplishments</li> <li>• Generally have a positive attitude</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Usually reluctant to be involved</li> <li>• Fault others for their failures</li> <li>• Concentrate on fears and problems</li> <li>• Avoid challenging situations</li> <li>• Constantly compare self to others</li> <li>• Withdrawn and often very shy</li> <li>• Blame others and feel guilty</li> <li>• Are defensive</li> <li>• Rarely offer information</li> <li>• Concentrate on failures</li> <li>• Generally have a negative attitude</li> </ul>

## Core Success Tools for You

### *Self-Esteem*

Children with a strong sense of self-esteem not only feel good about themselves, they know they belong, know they are unique, and they have a sense of their own power.

Some questions you can ask your children to open a discussion about Raising Self-Esteem are:

- Who am I?
- Do I like myself? Why or why not?
- Do I believe that I am good just as I am? Why or why not?
- How well do I treat myself? How do I allow myself to be treated?
- Do I appreciate the uniqueness of others and treat them accordingly?

The three distinct areas that we can focus on at home and as parents to help raise and strengthen our children’s self-esteem are their sense of connectedness, their uniqueness, and their sense of power. Naturally, these all blend together in our inner world, but we can work directly with each area to promote self-esteem and personal empowerment. Let’s look at each in turn.

## Connectedness

Children who have a feeling of connectedness know they are a part of the group whether it is the family, class at school, club, or community. They know that they belong and can contribute something of value. They also believe this about others in the group, thereby contributing to the group's cohesiveness. They include others in games or projects, or offer their own help when others have begun something. The current fad of exclusion is a perfect example of a generation not having a sense of connectedness. They believe that they are only acceptable when they belong to a certain clique, and at the same time exclude or mistreat certain others, who are not deemed good enough for that same clique.

Although bonding by exclusion is a form of group building that can bond the individuals in the group to one another, is not based on a sense of feeling good, but rather upon a false sense of belonging and of fear that, at some point, they too will not belong. In such a situation, there is an unspoken, vague catalog of requirements of the group, which can be changed or annulled at any time. Those persons actively excluded from the group are bullied, usually verbally, either directly or behind their back, and are left with a very poor sense of worth and connectedness. By enhancing the sense of belonging of all children, and especially their awareness that you are, indeed, ALL connected in one way or another, such destructive group activities will vastly decrease.

There was an interesting experiment done by a group of college students in southern California in the late 1970s. They planted a person at a lunch table in the cafeteria of a school. This person's job was to notice behavior whenever there was gossiping or exclusion taking place. Then, if the exclusion became a group dynamic instead of only a one- or two-person conversation, the plant's job was to interject something positive about the person being verbally excluded. And, the results were fascinating. In almost all of the cases, there were a number of people in the group who would participate in the gossip and verbal exclusion of the person. However, if the plant, only one single voice, said something positive, the gossip and exclusion stopped. Not only that, in many

instances, it actually turned around. Individuals who had remained quiet used the positive statement as a springboard to say something positive about the person that had just been gossiped about. This dynamic would indicate that exclusion as well as inclusion are group behaviors that can be influenced or even directed. So, why not use it to your advantage and teach your kids to speak a good word whenever possible!

## Core Success Tools for You

### *Connectedness*

Some ways that you can help your child feel more accepted and connected are to:

- Be sincerely interested, present, and authentic when interacting and communicating with your child; turn off the TV, put down the phone or paper and be with your child.
- Give acknowledgment to your child when possible.
- Name your child's accomplishments in detail, and express them in relation to his/her own measures, not by another's.
- Express acceptance and affection for your child, verbally, physically, and with your actions.
- Assign tasks that highlight the strengths and strengthen the weaknesses of your child.
- Create discussion times in the family when feelings are shared, such as mealtimes or on car rides. Encourage your child to address difficulties in the family or at school, and to help each other solve problems (in Chapter 3, Living to Thrive, see activity Family Meetings).
- Include your child who doesn't feel connected into family activities (especially if withdrawn) or give child tasks to include him/her in a family project.

## Uniqueness

Children who feel their worth as a person know that they, like every other person, are unique and special. They do not compare themselves to others, but rather measure their successes, strengths, and weaknesses according to their own internal guidelines. They accept themselves as whole, unique individuals. They are able, then, to offer this type of acceptance to others as well.

Whether you have one or seven children (or more!), each one of them is unique. Having that sense of individuality and specialness allows especially developing children to feel they have something special to bring to their family, their group of friends, and their community. The special way a person thinks, looks, and laughs; the talents he/she has; the sense of humor; and way of seeing and being in the world are what makes each person unique. Magnifying those special traits regularly allows children to feel a sense of celebration for their uniqueness. That is a very powerful contribution to a child's growing sense of self-esteem.

## **Core Success Tools for You**

### ***Uniqueness***

Some ways that an adult can facilitate a child's feeling of value and uniqueness are to:

- Accentuate your child's strengths by speaking them when you see them; play down weaknesses by suggesting steps for improvement and expressing your faith in their ability to transform them;
- Look for and support areas of special interest or ability;
- Emphasize talents;
- Acknowledge your child in front of others;
- Discuss the importance of seeing mistakes as learning opportunities and the necessity of missing the mark while practicing a skill—model seeing your own mistakes as learning opportunities!
- Designate a special and prominent area in the home where your child can display their work successes and ideas;
- Avoid correcting your child in front of others, waiting instead until the situation has passed or seeking out a one-on-one talk;
- Do exercises and have discussions to help your child (1) define and appreciate herself, and (2) describe and aspire to your child's desires and dreams.

## Personal Power

All of us have incredible power within. That life force has created who we are. Tapping into that power, or rediscovering it, contributes to your self-image and sense of self-worth. For a child to know that he has strength and clarity, the power to decide, to move forward, to choose directions, to affect a change, and to make a difference in the world helps him to feel he is in charge of his own life. He is not a victim of circumstances but rather the key player in the game of his own life. Feeling that sense of power allows a child, not to mention adults, to take action and make decisions from a place of ease and self-knowledge rather than from doubt or insecurity.

People who sit in their own sense of power have no need to push themselves on others or to use force to go after what they desire. As contradictory as it sounds, anger and bullying can be seen as an expression by people who feel out of control and are seeking a sense of power for themselves. Encouraging kids to develop their sense of power gives them a calm and reliable sense of stability within as they navigate their world, thus eliminating the need to control anyone or anything other than themselves.

*“Encouraging a child means that one or more of the following critical life messages are coming through, either by word or by action: I believe in you, I trust you, I know you can handle this, You are listened to, You are cared for, You are very important to me.”*

**BARBARA COLOROSO**

## Core Success Tools for You

### *Personal Power*

Here are some ways you can facilitate your child's experience of his/her own sense of power.

- Plan activities that emphasize the power of each person, such as having a child with a good sense of direction lead the way on a hike, or a child who is a clear decision-maker guide others in the family to learn how to make their own decisions;
- Help your child define goals, and then devise a game plan for achieving them;
- Acknowledge and celebrate personal successes at school, in sports and hobbies, and at home;
- Encourage your child to make her own decisions. Discuss the process of decision making in detail. Assist unsure children by limiting the choices when decisions are made (this is necessary with younger children in any case);
- Define time and its freedoms and restrictions with your child. Help him learn to work with and manage it;
- Design with your child a tracking system she can use for improvement and successes;
- Accent the process of improving rather than the goal achieved.

## Self-Image

How you see yourself plays a large role in how you feel about, and esteem, yourself. Many of us do not allow ourselves to feel really great about ourselves. You may say you long to feel good, that you want to finally stop beating yourself up for this or that perceived weakness or flaw. But do you ever allow yourself to finally arrive at feeling great about yourself? Usually not and as you know all too well, you can't teach something that you, yourself, don't know how to do. So, in order to help your children see themselves in a positive light, to feel really great about who they are, you have to—you guessed it—do so for yourself! And, here's your chance to start.

## Core Success Tools for You

### *Self-Image*

Here's a simple exercise you can do to improve your sense of power and self-esteem. After you've completed it, you can walk your child through the steps as well.

#### **What's Best about ME . . .**

1. Reserve a quiet evening for yourself. Literally, put "quiet evening" in your calendar as you do your doctor's appointment or tire change date. Now, turn your attention kindly toward yourself. Sit down with a pen and paper and create a list of the best things about yourself—things you like about yourself and things you can do well. Allow yourself to be honest, acknowledging all the things you have going for you. You're allowed to speak well of yourself!
2. Next go look in the mirror. Yes, get up and go look in the mirror. Imagine what others may see in you, or what positive feedback you have heard. Now go back and write down these things as well.
3. Next, on a different piece of paper write a list of things you would like to change about yourself, things you'd like to learn or do differently. Be sure to make assessments instead of judgments. Here is the difference between an assessment-based and a judgment-based desire:
  - Assessment-based: I'd like to improve my note reading and learn to play an entire piece of music on the piano.
  - Judgment-based: I stink at reading music and want to, at the very least, be able to play one single piece of music on the piano.
4. After you have your list of attributes you admire about yourself and of things you'd like to change, post them both in a prominent place in your home. Read them frequently and give yourself acknowledgment for what you have already accomplished and become. Then acknowledge yourself for striving to be the best person you can be. Take your hat off to yourself for having goals and being willing to work toward them.

Treating yourself with this kind of respect and recognition will take you farther down the road of success in feeling great and having positive self-esteem than would judging yourself and tearing yourself down. And, isn't it your goal to build yourself up and to feel good? Isn't that what you want for your kids as well? This is a plan on how to practice and achieve just that.

## The Mistake Misnomer

The fear of making mistakes or, put differently, the intense need to always know the answer or to do it right, hinders your ability to learn. Truly believing you have to have the answer, or that it has to be done perfectly the first time, stops you from figuring it out. Children are not exempt from this strong desire to “do it right.” Yet this behavior, which is learned from the people (ahem!) and events in their lives, can be unlearned. Trusting yourself to do the best you can and to believe that, with practice, you can master your task is key to the learning process and especially to the joy involved in that process. This can only take place, however, when we adults first eradicate our own fear of making mistakes, doing it wrong, embarrassing ourselves, or not feeling we are good enough.

Let’s take the case of learning to write the alphabet. The first time you printed the letter “t” it certainly did not resemble the “t” you can now pen. The hook at the bottom was either nonexistent or too big, giving the impression of an umbrella, or the cross bar was floating in air, or sitting on the hook. These first attempts helped us realize that it just didn’t look right and needed to be done differently. Perhaps you needed to shift your paper, adjust the pencil lower in your hand, or relax your shoulder. Every “t” was not a mistake. On the contrary, each was another opportunity to finely tune that letter, until the day that most of your “t’s” looked, well, like “t’s”!

So, indeed, mistakes are misunderstood; they are not something that we should fear, shun, or hide. They are an essential component of the learning process. The only way *to* learn is by: diving in, doing your best, seeing how far off you are of the goal, learning from each attempt, coming to realize how you can do it better, and then practicing, practicing, practicing. Eventually, you master your task.

## Formulating Feelings

Humans are blessed with a complex nature of a logical mind and big emotions. With varied possibilities of expressing your emotions (from the Latin *to move*), formulating feelings can take many forms. Before you are able to express what you are

feeling, you must first be able to sense your feelings, to define them, before you can move to the next step of expressing them in a manner beneficial to you. Feelings are always moving and motivating you, whether you are aware of them or not. Taking the time to first become clear about their presence and then train how to communicate them well will greatly

assist you in dealing with people and events in your life. Doing so will also help you develop and maintain healthy and nurturing relationships with others.

There is a tendency to assume that certain feelings such as happiness, contentment, and relaxation are “good,” and feelings such as anger, resentment, and agitation are “bad.” Feelings are categorized this way firstly because of what you experience when you have them, but also you judge feelings this way because of what you have learned, because of your beliefs and your social norms. Yet, judging them that way cuts you off from their validity and, hence, from dealing with them effectively. By judging what you feel, you divorce yourself from the process of intimately knowing what you feel, and from expressing it in a healthy and appropriate manner.

And, judging feelings doesn't make them go away. You actually confuse a situation by judging what you are feeling. No matter how they could be categorized, it is by being aware of all of your feelings that you can much better define them. When you have that awareness, you are then able to take responsibility and ownership of your feelings. All feelings along the spectrum of emotion are part of your humanness. They are important in the scheme of life. It is useful to embrace them so that you can then deal with them in a healthy manner.

Also, getting to know the triggers and causes of your feelings is very helpful in raising your awareness. This practice helps you get to know, accept, and love yourself. When you learn how to identify and then express your emotions, you master the art of well-being and good relations.

Identifying in which situations you experience which feelings is hugely helpful. You are then better able to understand your child

*The fear of making mistakes or, put differently, the intense need to always know the answer or to do it right, hinders your ability to learn.*

and to help them understand and navigate their own feelings. You can practice tools to verbally and physically express feelings in a way that honors you and those you are interacting with. Respect for your own inner world, for your feelings, and also for the feelings of others is a sign of emotional maturity.

Using “I Messages” as opposed to “You Messages” is essential in the expression phase of knowing your feelings. Briefly, since this will be covered in Chapter 6, *Resolving Conflict*, a “You Message” is what most often leads to conflict. When one speaks about what the other person did, or thinks, usually formulated with accusations and assumptions it is called a “You Message.” An “I Message” speaks clearly from one’s own perspective and refrains from accusations and assumptions. It is respectful and goes a long way to prevent conflict and maintain respectful communication. Practicing that kind of communication is almost miraculous in the changes it creates.

## The Art of Acknowledgment

*Kids hear everything you say, but they hear criticism a lot louder.*

**HARRY SHEEHY**

Acknowledgment can be defined as the act of accepting, or recognizing, a fact—the importance or quality of something or someone. It is expressing or displaying gratitude for, or appreciation of, that person or thing. It is based on acceptance of the person and the knowledge that the person is doing her absolute best in all situations, given what she has learned, currently believes, and is presently capable of. Acknowledge the good and eliminate blame from the equation.

You need to differentiate between using acknowledgment to express that you accept and value someone as a person, and using praise as a ploy to influence someone. If children are confident in who they are, compared only with their own performance or standards, then you are giving them a gift of believing in themselves and encouraging them to strive toward improvement because it feels good to them. You are acknowledging them. If they feel good about themselves and their own accomplishments, there is no urge to be better than others. It is

enough to be good according to their own standards. Acknowledging children and encouraging them to keep on their track is also an effective process to uphold their natural love of learning.

If, on the other hand, you use your own opinion as a standard, and/or compare their accomplishments to others, and pack it in “nice” words, they develop an attitude of competition or sense of not being “good enough.” Comparison often creates the feeling of internal pressure to meet external demands. Unhealthy and unstructured competition breeds contempt among siblings, students, and friends whereas constructive acknowledgment keeps the focus and personal satisfaction on doing one’s own job well and accomplishing that which one sets forth to do. Other people’s opinions then carry less weight and there is no striving only in order to do better than the other guy. Acknowledgment does not mean you ignore areas of improvement or point out what went wrong. It does mean, though, that in doing so you focus on what went right while encouraging improvement in other aspects.

By acknowledging you need to first observe, in detail, how a person behaves or what he has done. Then you share your observations with him in words or actions. You can, therefore, encourage and remind others when they are down and have lost sight of their beauty. Hearing affirming words regularly can support one’s personal sense of well-being. Acknowledgment, when used as a tool for better relations and building self-esteem, lets people feel confirmed, especially after they have invested time and energy into something. Being acknowledged gives you a mirror in which you can see your own accomplishments reflected back to you. This keeps you focused on doing your best according to your own standards and striving toward self-set goals. When you are acknowledged this way, you can then sit back and observe what you have done with a sense of satisfaction: “Yes, I have worked hard and my efforts have paid off,” or, “Well, it isn’t perfect, but I have improved a lot since last time.” Practicing this form of acknowledgment will go a long way toward raising your child’s self-esteem.

## Core Success Tools for You

### *The Art of Self-Acceptance*

Simple statements that observe in detail a person's efforts, mirror what you see about them, or recognize their improvement are valuable tools to build solid self-acceptance.

For example:

- You have worked all morning without giving up. That is determination.
- You completed that art project exactly according to the directions your teacher gave you. Good follow-through.
- What an imaginative idea. No doubt you will be able to implement it.
- I see that you have given your best on this homework.
- Even though it didn't go as well as you wished, you're working at it diligently and that shows your desire to succeed. I believe in you.

The environment will never cease giving you information and feedback. That is how you learn about the world, how people think, and how you are perceived. It is, therefore, highly useful when you build and maintain strong self-esteem to filter out any judgment from “out there” that you are not OK. Judgments that you are not OK are purely statements from the speaker's viewpoint and are not an accurate assessment of who you are. The fact is that your value as a person is never tarnished by your actions, even when others, or even yourself, view them as “wrong” or undesirable. Your acknowledgment is one way of offering your child a positive environment to counter balance what the world at large offers up—a connected parent can offset negative feedback.

## External Orientation vs. Internal Orientation

When you use self-awareness, instead of comparison, and have a strong sense of self-acceptance, built with the aid of acknowledgment, you are equipped with an internal navigation system that shows you how to maneuver through the events of your day. Since you are the one living your life, it is important that this

map is one that you have self-designed, know intimately, can navigate, or can change at will. Learning to trust your own assessment and taking self-determined action is a process in which you can practically support your children. Dynamic trust in yourself is trust that is constantly challenged, questioned, confirmed, and relied upon on a daily basis. Being acknowledged buoys the trust in your own abilities to take care of yourself, and to do your personal best, especially in the home environment.

## The Words You Use

*Change your words and you change your world,  
for your words create your world.*

Language is the most effective tool humans possess to communicate needs, feelings, ideas, and thoughts. From birth onward you experience language as a form of interaction. It is our only direct means—other than touch—to convey our inner world with others. In learning any language the first phase that takes place is passive understanding, then comes a limited application of the broader passive knowledge, and then active mastery of the language, using it as a tool for precise communication.

### *How does language create your view of the world?*

There is not a moment during your waking hours when a constant dialogue is not taking place inside your head. Stop reading this sentence now and listen for a moment to what your inner conversation is about. What is the subject matter and what are your opinions? Usually this dialogue goes unnoticed. Occasionally you click into it so as to share what you are just thinking, or to take action on a current thought. However, although the vast majority of the dialogue rambles on unnoticed, you are still constantly acting from its content. This constant dialogue, and the language used in it, determines how you see yourself, see others, and designs your very concept of the world. The language you use becomes the architect of your reality and the filter of your experiences.

### *How do others hear you?*

As the speaker in conversation with others you first select the thoughts you want to share and then formulate them as you wish. Then you choose the words to impart those ideas to whom you are speaking. Depending on the language you choose, the conversation will take on different taints, pictures, and directions. In addition to your body language with its unspoken intention, what you are verbally expressing is being filtered by the receiving lens of the person listening to you. And their filter is formed according to their personal history, definition of certain words, current perspective and emotional state, and how they decipher your nonverbal communication. These factors determine how your words land this way, or that way, in the listener's perception. Seen in this light it is amazing two people can communicate at all! In any case, communication is truly a challenge and an art of understanding one another.

### *How different self-talk affects you*

A failed test:

You failed the last test you took in math. There are a myriad of ways that you could choose to look at this situation and consequently dialogue with yourself about it. One possibility is:

1. "Man, I am dumb! I knew a lot of those answers and I stupidly rushed through and got so many wrong. I don't even need to try again because I'll do the same thing again. Man, I'm a loser."

Another possibility is:

2. "What a drag. I knew a lot of those answers! If I'd taken the time I could've answered almost every one correctly. I *know* I can do better. The next time I'm going to concentrate on going more slowly and really focus. I know whenever I really work at something I can always improve. Next time I'll ace it."

Clearly, depending on which of these inner dialogues you choose to engage in, your attitude following the test results will certainly be

different. And the outcome of the next test will also be different. It's only a matter of willingness to speak highly of yourself and to practice words that build your self-worth.

I wasn't invited to the party:

Five friends from your tennis club were invited to a friend's birthday party, and you were not. One possibility to dialogue with yourself about this is:

1. "I thought I was one of his friends, too. He really doesn't like me; if he did, he would have invited me as well. Well, I'll show him. I'll just not be his friend either. He can play the next tournament alone. Anyway, who needs his birthday party?"

Another possibility is:

2. "Boy, I'd really like to go to his birthday party. I wonder why he invited the others and not me. I thought we were friends. Kind of makes me feel left out and not liked. If I get a chance, I'm going to ask him about it. I'd like to at least know his reasons why. And if I'm really not invited, we can still be friends. Heck, we're on the same team. But it's his party and he can invite whom he wants to."

## Core Success Tools for You

### *The Words You Use*

Using words that take away your power bring you down and confirm a belief about yourself that then continues to disempower you, hence creating a downward spiral.

There's a simple tool called The Law of Displacement that requires only alertness to the thoughts you think. It merely entails replacing one thought that generates bad feelings and bombards your mind with thoughts that create good feelings instead. It's helpful to put these thoughts into writing so that the recognition and replacement become easier. Make a list of your self-talk, of that constant chatter of those words that don't do you any good. Then for each of those words or phrases, write down three new ones to counter, and practice, practice, practice.

For example:

- I can't.
- I don't know.
- There's no hope.
- It's all over.
- I don't have a chance.
- I give up.

By re-training yourself to use different words you shift your focus and with it your world and experiences become more powerful and useful to you.

For example:

- I can if I work at it; I can do anything; if I want to, I can.
- I have the answer; I'll figure it out; I just need to look for it.
- There is always a way; I won't give up; tomorrow is a new chance.
- Anything is possible; every ending is a beginning; no means "next."
- I am blessed with opportunities; I've got something special to offer; why not me?
- Now I've got it; I'll never give up; I'm determined.

Positively languaging yourself is trainable and attainable. Tomorrow during quiet times, before getting out of bed, while driving to work, eating your lunch, allow words to float through your mind that are uplifting: happiness, joy, contentment, peace, harmony, excitement, accomplished, tranquility, connectedness. Whatever words are meaningful and uplifting to you, let them filter into your consciousness. Practice that for 30 days and you will see a vast difference in how you feel and see yourself and the world.

## The Lure of Listening

Listening, not just hearing but truly listening, to someone is one of the greatest gifts you can give to a person. Being such a crucial factor in all communication and relationships, listening is covered frequently in this book, and more specifically in Chapter 6, *Resolving Conflict*.

Tuning into your own inner dialogue first, and really listening to it, can profoundly benefit not only your listening ability but your quest in building a more positive self-image—doing so you hear what your thoughts convey about your self-concept and your view of the world. Next you can shift your focus to tune into what people around you are saying. Actively listening to what they are expressing, and reflecting back to them in order to confirm accuracy, will give you insight into who they are, and how they see their world. It will also give you the opportunity to connect to them and support them better.

As parents you have a profound responsibility to honor what your children share with you, and with each other. Listening deeply to your children reminds you that they are still sharing from a place of purity. Hearing what they directly, and indirectly, say is a valuable tool in helping them build a connection between you and them, as well as build a stronger sense of self.

This process of actively listening is actually less time consuming than what we as parents usually do: hearing on the fly what is being said, asking them to repeat it once or more, not getting the message, or misunderstanding, then doing the whole thing over again until clarity prevails. This quality of listening will open up worlds for children, and for the listener as well. It is the first step in building trust.

## Core Success Tools for You

### *Listening to and Speaking to Your Children*

When listening to your children:

- Get down to their eye level (or up – my son is 6’4”!).
- Look them in the eye.
- Indicate you are interested.
- Do not interrupt or rush them.
- Listen to what they say without judgment, admonition, or advice.
- Ask for clarification if needed.
- Reflect back what you have heard.

Seeking to understand and then communicating what you understand is very effective. In reflecting back to the speaker what you’ve heard, you affirm whether your understanding is correct. It also lets the other person know you are listening.

When speaking to your children, you can say:

- If I understand you correctly, you feel that....
- I think I understand. Is it that you ... ?
- It looks like you are sure that ....
- It is difficult when that happens. How can I assist you?
- Oh, you mean that; you hoped that; they would.
- That is important for you, I know. Thank you for telling me about it.
- It sounds to me like you are sad about ...
- You look really happy. Did you say that ... ?
- I think that you would like.... Is that correct, or do you want something else?
- I’m not sure I understand. Could you repeat that please?
- It is important to me to really listen to you and I am busy now. Could you share it with me in 10 minutes?
- So, you are angry that happened. Is that right?

I’d like to share this poem with you that really says it all...

#### **Please Just Listen to Me**

When I ask you to listen to me, and you start giving advice,

You have not done what I asked.

When I ask you to listen to me, and you begin  
to tell me why I shouldn’t feel that way,

You are trampling on my feelings.

When I ask you to listen to me, and you feel you  
have to do something to solve my problem,

You have failed me, strange as that may seem.

Listen! All I asked, was that you listen,

Not talk or do—just hear me.

And I can do for myself; I'm not helpless. Maybe  
discouraged and faltering, but not helpless.

When you do something for me that I can and need to  
do for myself, you contribute to my fear and weakness.

But, when you accept as a simple fact that I do  
feel what I feel, no matter how irrational,

Then I can quit trying to convince you

And can get about the business of understanding  
what's behind this irrational feeling.

And when that's clear, the answers are  
obvious and I don't need advice.

Irrational feelings make sense when we  
understand what's behind them.

Perhaps that's why prayer works, for some  
people. Because God is mute, and

He doesn't give advice or try to fix things.

He just listens and lets you work it out for yourself.

So, please listen and just hear me.

And, if you want to talk, wait a minute for  
your turn; and I'll listen to you.

**Ray Houghton, MD, "Teen Times," Nov/Dec 1979**

As parents, caretakers, and teachers, it is vital that you be authentic and purposeful in your interactions with your children. Every interaction you have with your child is literally another practice session in the formation of his self-image and self-worth. You can create the circumstances and environment that will help your children form a strong, positive, and healthy sense of self. You do so by the language you use and the way you impart information, acknowledgment, and critique. What is essential is a deep acceptance of the person you are as you speak to your child. A keen awareness of what you say and, especially, how you say it is crucial.

## Core Success Tools for You

### *Strengthening Self-Esteem*

You can help build your child's self-esteem in the following ways:

- Use your child's name only in a kind voice. If you're angry, don't use her name.
- Give a lot of hugs.
- Have one-to-one conversations with your child every day.
- Provide multiple ways for your child to feel successful and needed at home.
- Display your child's work and ideas around the house.
- Give your child a responsibility at home.
- Speak positively about your child to others and in his presence.
- Take time to point out the positive aspects of your child's efforts.
- Never criticize your child's question.
- Take time to help struggling kids understand.
- Help your child turn failure into a positive learning experience.
- Encourage your child to take risks.
- Provide opportunities for your child to make her own decisions about certain aspects of your home life, such as, how to decorate the dining table, the destination of the next family outing, etc.
- Provide opportunities for siblings to work with each other.
- Be curious. Don't make assumptions about a child's behavior. Ask sincere questions.
- Allow your child to experience the consequences of his behavior – don't be overly protective.
- Allow your child to explore options in different situations.
- Celebrate your child's achievements, no matter how small!
- Before bedtime take time to acknowledge the things you saw and heard your child doing well that day.

## Conclusion

Being personally involved in the process of building self-esteem, and then helping your children do so for themselves, will simultaneously facilitate them to contribute to positive self-esteem in others. And in order to accept others for who they are, you must first accept yourself for who you are. It is a self-perpetuating process.

Feeling good about oneself not only assures a satisfying and

enjoyable life, but strong self-esteem creates positive relationships with others. Valuing yourself offers you the insight and ability to value others. High self-esteem is the foundation for peaceful interactions among people and for personal core success.

## CORE Success Factors of Raising Self-Esteem

CLARITY	OWNERSHIP	RESOLUTION	EXCELLENCE
Define self-concept Strengthen self-esteem Identify traits of self-esteem Build positive self-image	Choose positive attitude Know and express feelings Accept yourself Be wise with words you use	Disempower mistakes Use acknowledgment Listen	Build connectedness Build uniqueness Build power Practice tools to raise self-esteem

## Keys to CORE Success

- ♣ Self-esteem is the foundation of emotional well-being.
- ♣ Self-esteem enables people to build healthy and peaceful relationships.
- ♣ As adults, you must re-train your own interaction habits.
- ♣ What I think then becomes true in my perception.
- ♣ There is a stark difference between boasting and self-recognition.
- ♣ Competition with others is a trap. Compare only with one's own measurement of success.
- ♣ Mistakes are mandatory.
- ♣ Accept others for who they are, not what they do.
- ♣ Use the tools.

## Challenges and FAQs

- ✓ *I struggle with my own self-esteem, how can I help my child build their own?* Not many adults have a healthy sense of self-esteem, so you are not alone. Especially if you feel challenged in this area, practice some of these tools with yourself

first. Find ways to feel your own uniqueness, connectedness, and power. Do the suggested *CORE Success Tools for You* exercises in this chapter on a weekly basis until your lists grow longer and until being appreciative of yourself becomes a sincerely comfortable thing for you to do.

- ✓ I also urge you to become aware of how you speak to yourself. Start a list of the phrases you use when addressing yourself and your actions, such as, *How dumb can you be? Man, I'm a loser. I never get it right*, etc. When your patterns become apparent, apply the suggestions in the *CORE Success Tools for You* exercise also in this chapter in your self-talk. Remember the SOADA steps of self-awareness? See, own, accept, decide, and act. Do that with these tools to build self-esteem for yourself and you can literally be the change you wish to see in your family!
- ✓ *My teenage daughter thinks all this positive reinforcement is uncool and fake.* If you spend some time listening to how these young people speak to one another, you will understand the source of their skepticism. Nonetheless, persevere. However, be very aware of your authenticity. If you don't think they did a good job cleaning up their room, then acknowledge them for making an effort. If you see their attention to homework is slacking off, speak to them of the potential you see in them and that you know they can pull off better grades if they wanted to. A trainer I once had taught me to believe in, speak to, and act according to the highest potential I see in my children and they will align themselves with that picture of themselves. The teen years can be challenging for many reasons, but the need to feel good about one's self and the desire to have our parents believe in us does not wane during that time. If anything, it increases.
- ✓ *How can I help my child to believe in himself when he's getting the daily message from "out there" that he is only okay, if he does xyz?* Being the singular, kind yet honest measure of one's own self-worth is the very heart of self-esteem. There will always be input from outside of ourselves—some great, some not. The art is to listen to what is said and take from it the critique that is useful—according to one's own value

system—and leave the rest behind, knowing it is a statement only about the speaker’s perspective and not about one’s own value.

For years I had been told I was a tyrant. Those comments continued to cripple my self-esteem. During my process of transformation, I decided to look at that consistent feedback for any truth as seen through the filter of my own value system. What a gift that was. I came to see that I had learned to use anger to feel my power, and also to motivate myself. Through that self-reflection I also discovered that was not the way I wanted to feel powerful or move myself forward. So, being a student of myself, I worked at it and changed that pattern until my behavior aligned with my values of respect and kindness, toward others and myself. Making that change helped me eliminate my need to use anger at all and drastically increased my self-esteem.



## ANCHOR WITH ACTIVITIES



### I Can

#### *What's the point?*

To help children develop an awareness and appreciation of all the things they *can* do.

#### **What do I need?**

Chart paper, markers/pencils/colored pencils, tin cans (emptied with one end removed and labels off), white paper cut to fit around the tin can

#### **What do I do?**

Put the words I CAN at the top of the chart paper. List the things that you can do. Ask children to tell you some things they can do, or have them list them in their CORE Success Notebook.

Examples could be:

- I can sing
- I can swim
- I can jog 1 mile
- I can ride a skateboard
- I can cook
- I can speak Italian

Have children write and or draw things that they can do on the white paper provided. Have them work horizontally on the paper (so it will fit around the can)—just the word or phrase is sufficient, there is no need for

the word I CAN to be put on the can. Have children color and decorate their cans, which can be used around the house, for example, to put pencils in or as a flower vase.

**Note:** Put the cans on display next to a tent card with the title in large letters "THINGS I CAN DO." Share the cans with friends.

### *How do I continue the conversation?*

- How did you feel doing this activity?
- Did you learn more about yourself?
- Do you appreciate what you can do now?

### *Take it a step further*

**Self-esteem banners:** Cut a large piece of paper to resemble a flag banner or vertical banner; draw three circles on it. The child's name will go on the side of the flag banner or on the top of the vertical banner. In the first circle children put "Things I can do" (then make a list under the heading), second circle is "Things I want to learn to do" (then make list under this heading), and third circle is for a photo or drawing of themselves. The banner can be decorated and colored once children have completed the circles.



## Ex-haling Experiences

### *What's the point?*

To develop an awareness and understanding that how we treat others is crucial in helping to build or destroy their self-esteem. That it is important to be empathetic toward others.

### *What do I need?*

Ex-haling Experiences Story (see Appendix), chart paper, markers, one balloon for each person, story (see below), CORE Success Notebook, pencils

### *What do I do?*

Pass out a balloon to each person. Ask each person to blow up the balloon but do not tie a knot in the end. They are to hold it well in their fingers with it blown up but the end untied. Then, do the following activity:

Speaker says: "Our self-esteem is how we feel about ourselves. How good we feel about ourselves is often affected by how others treat us. If somebody is nasty to us, teases us, puts us down, rejects us, hits us, etc., then some of our self-esteem is destroyed. I am going to tell you a story to illustrate how this happens in everyday life."

Proceed to tell the children about a boy, or a girl, who is about the same age as your children are. An outline is provided below. Pick a name that no one is familiar with. As you tell the story, be as emotional and dramatic as you can. You will have to fill it in with your own imagination. As you describe each event that negatively affects the "made up" child's self-esteem, ask each person to let some air out of the balloon. A possible outline for the story follows. Feel free to adapt, add to, and change in any way you want. (You can have the children help create the story as you go along.) Here we have chosen a girl.

Read the story Ex-haling Experiences to the family. You can think of other examples to help you, if you want to add to the storyline.

- Being picked last to play ball at recess.
- Being picked on by bullies on the way home from school.
- Missing a lot of shots at basketball practice and being laughed at.
- Having a sibling make fun of a trait.

As the story ends, showing the child going to bed with very deflated self-esteem, there should be little or no more air in the balloons. When you finish, ask the following questions, which can be written on chart paper and children can answer in their CORE Success Notebooks or in a family discussion:

- How does *your* balloon get deflated?
- What things affect you the most?

- What do you do that deflates the self-esteem of others—at home, in school, playing sports?
- How do you feel when your self-esteem is deflated? When you deflate someone else's?
- What can we do to help people enlarge their balloons (build their self-esteem) rather than make it smaller?

### ***Take it a step further***

Share and discuss answers to these questions. Have everyone think about one thing that they will do each day to help build someone's self-esteem. For a certain time period, a week or 14 days, ask each family member each day to share what they did and the effect it had on the person.

