

## EVERYDAY CHALLENGES:

# CHILDREN AND SELF-ESTEEM

There is no question that poor self-esteem is a common contributor to many of the challenges our young people face as they grow up. Children need to learn to recognize and identify their feelings, both positive and negative, recognize the differences that exist for boys and girls with reference to this topic, and be provided with useful tips and tools to recognize their strengths and abilities.

According to a Study on Youth Trends, completed by Health Canada,

- In general, happiness for young people is related to their relationship with parents and their adjustment at school.
- Overall, boys tend to be happier about their life than girls.
- Students with high self-esteem are more likely to:
  - feel happy;
  - have a positive relationship with their parents;
  - not feel depressed;
  - not feel helpless;
  - not feel lonely;
  - not feel left out;
  - not have bad moods;
  - be well adjusted at school;
  - feel healthy;
  - achieve higher marks in school;
  - not be bullied.
- The vast majority of young people said that they ‘like themselves’, although when asked the question, ‘Do you often wish you were someone else?’, far more girls than boys responded “yes”.
- When asked the question, ‘Is there anything about your body that you would like to change?’, between one-third and three-quarters responded “yes”, with girls more likely to want changes. By grade ten, about half of the males and three-quarters of the females wanted to alter at least one aspect of their appearance.

The following pages outline tips that can serve as starting points to help you work through this issue with your children. Also, check out our commercials on self-esteem at [www.cca-kids.ca](http://www.cca-kids.ca).

TIPS FOR PARENTS:

## PROMOTING POSITIVE SELF-ESTEEM WITH GIRLS

- **What Makes Them Tick?**  
Be aware of the issues that are important to your girls. Talk about them and find out what drives their concerns.
- **Focus on Healthy Body Image.**  
Body image is a huge consideration for girls. Try talking to your girls about having a healthy and individual body image. The important thing is for them to be happy with 'who they really are'.
- **Help Set Realistic Expectations.**  
Young girls are sometimes influenced by the images they see in the media. Discuss these images and remind them that what they see on television or in magazines is created with special techniques, make-up, lighting, trick photography, etc. Remind them that the way they look is only one part of what makes them who they are.
- **Explain Family Values.**  
Find opportunities to share discussions related to family values. Research reminds us that as parents, we are the most influential people in our girls' lives.
- **Know Their Friends.**  
Get to know your daughter's friends. Participate in two-way conversations with their friends when possible.
- **Celebrate Wise Choices.**  
Celebrate good choices that your daughter makes. When she tells you about a wise choice she has made with reference to friends, appearance, activities, etc., praise her for her thinking skills.
- **Listen.**  
Sometimes just listening is all that is needed. Girls have the ability to vent their feelings and express their emotions – good and bad.
- **Explore.**  
Explore books, websites and other materials that describe the changes girls go through as they grow to become women. Let them know that the feelings and changes they are experiencing are a normal part of growing up.
- **Talk About the Future.**  
Talk to your girls about their likes, dislikes, hopes, dreams and plans for the future. Help them to set attainable, realistic goals. Celebrate successes!



TIPS FOR KIDS:

## GIRLS, BE THE BEST YOU CAN BE.

- **Speak Up!**  
You have a right to be heard. Speak up when you have something to say.
- **Attitude is Everything.**  
Don't let anyone tell you that you 'can't' do something. The only way you will know for sure is to try!
- **Set Your Priorities!**  
Decide what things really matter in your life and work toward achieving them – one at a time.
- **Be Positive.**  
Identify those things that you do well. Use your successes to build on your challenges. Believe that you CAN do it!
- **Make Up Your Mind.**  
Listen to others and then make up your own mind about what's good for you.
- **Set a Goal.**  
If you would like to make positive changes in your life, set goals that you can achieve. Remember to start small and think big!
- **Choose Your Friends.**  
Think about the qualities that you really want in a friend. Once you have identified them, seek out friends who are good for you and fit the bill!
- **Be True To Yourself.**  
Think about the consequences of actions before taking part in risky activities. You know what is best for you!
- **Look Inside.**  
The next time you look in a mirror, pretend that you can see not only your outside, but your inside too. Are you happy with what you see?
- **Store Your Good Times.**  
Make a list of all those things that you love to do, or experiences that have made you happy. When you are having a down day, review the list and put on a smile!

If you are still frustrated and none of these suggestions seem to be working for you, call the **Kids Help Phone** at **1 (800) 668-6868**. Remember that there is always someone who will listen to you.

TIPS FOR PARENTS:

## PROMOTING POSITIVE SELF-ESTEEM WITH BOYS

Here are some tips and tools to keep in mind when helping your boys grow into healthy, responsible, well-rounded young men.

- **Encourage Expression.**  
Research tells us that boys have difficulty identifying their feelings and emotions, as well as expressing them. Try engaging boys in family discussions that provide them with a safe and caring environment to express their feelings.
- **No Judgements Here.**  
Boys often suppress emotions because they are easily embarrassed. Let them know that it is okay to talk about their experiences without being laughed at or judged.
- **Help to Manage Their Frustrations.**  
Boys need to learn strategies for dealing effectively with anger. Help them to learn how to express frustration and anger in non-violent, appropriate ways.
- **Know Their Friends.**  
Peer relationships are very important to boys. Get to know their friends and encourage positive relationships.
- **Identify Their Strengths.**  
Boys often equate popularity and success with being good at sports. Help your boys identify what they are good at. Encourage them to focus on their strengths. Remember that 'everybody is good at something' whether it's sports or something else. What's your thing?
- **Equip Them to Deal with Peer Pressure.**  
Peer pressure is a major challenge in boys' lives. Review the 'Starting Points for Family Discussions to Avoid Negative Peer Pressure' with your boys. Encourage them to fill their 'tool kit' with lots of strategies for saying "no".
- **Think Outside the Box.**  
Sometimes, boys feel uncomfortable engaging in activities that are 'traditionally' for girls. Encourage your boys to participate in non-traditional roles that they enjoy (cooking, dancing, singing, etc.).
- **Channel Their Energy.**  
Boys have lots of energy! The key is to help them learn to channel that energy towards positive means. A little guidance and support goes a long way to helping boys make appropriate, healthy choices.



TIPS FOR KIDS:

## BOYS, BE THE BEST YOU CAN BE.

Here are some tips for feeling better when you're not feeling your best!

- **Assess the Situation.**

If you are feeling frustrated, embarrassed or angry, ask yourself these questions: Is it really that bad? What is the worst that can happen? Will this event really change my life?

- **Make a Joke.**

Sometimes when we are uncomfortable about something, we can put an amusing spin on the situation so it won't seem so bad. Try pretending that you are enjoying the situation and make a joke out of it. Sometimes laughing at yourself is an easy way to take away the tension.

- **Let it Pass.**

Sometimes, things aren't nearly as bad as they seem. If something is getting you down, take a step back to see if it's one of those situations. If it is, put it out of your mind and carry on as if nothing has happened.

- **Talk it Out.**

If something is really bothering you, find someone who you feel you can talk to and tell him or her how you feel. Chances are they may have felt the same way at some point and they might even have some helpful suggestions.

- **Go to the Source.**

This is a difficult option, but if you feel that you can handle it, try having a polite, meaningful discussion with the person who is making you feel embarrassed or angry. Chances are they had no intention of making you feel that way.

- **Examine your Feelings.**

Why are you feeling embarrassed, hurt or angry? What do you intend to do about it so that the situation doesn't repeat itself?

There is no simple recipe that will help you to get yourself out of situations that make you feel angry, hurt or embarrassed. The important point is to understand what you are feeling and why you are feeling it. Then find someone you trust to talk to. Try all the tools until you find one that works for you.

If you are still frustrated and none of these suggestions seem to be working for you, call the **Kids Help Phone** at **1 (800) 668-6868**. Remember that there is always someone who will listen to you.