

Raising children's self-esteem



What is self-esteem? Children often describe self-esteem as having "good feelings" about themselves. On a more adult level, self-esteem can perhaps best be described as a feeling of acceptance, worth and value among one's peer group and in the wider world.

Self-esteem is critically important to quality of life. As a parent or teacher you have a vitally important role to play in cultivating positive self-esteem in the children in your care.

Feeling accepted is one of the most important aspects of a good self-image. You can create this in a child by practising your listening skills. Invite your child to talk. Ask some open-ended questions to get them to open up. Once they start talking, listen carefully to what they have to say. Help them find the words to describe what they mean and listen without judgment. When they describe a problem, do not try to solve it for them. Usually, children just want to be heard and understood. They will solve their own problems in good time, and benefit from a feeling of increased power.

Acceptance is another big part of self-esteem building in children. Nobody is perfect. You need to accept your child with their faults if they are to develop a proper self-image. Acceptance is not the kind of thing you can fake. If you do not accept them as they are, they will know it. It is important to recognise your child's strengths and weaknesses, and commit to reinforcing, nurturing and building on your child's strengths. The only traits you need to change in your child are those that will directly cause harm to him/her or others.

Many well-meaning caregivers develop a habit of over-praising children. However, a child can tell the difference between genuine appreciation and hollow flattery. Show interest in what your child does and appreciate the significance of challenges being overcome, rather than just offering mindless approval over frivolous activities. Likewise, helping a child learn to come to terms with defeats is much more conducive to good self-esteem than wholly fixating on the positive.

Above all, be a good role model. Positive, optimistic parents and

teachers create positive, optimistic children. Negativity will only breed negativity.

Self-esteem specialist, Janice Davies, has a list of ways to boost your child's confidence and self-esteem while having fun in the process. They include:

- Ensure that children are valued for a variety of skills so they learn tolerance.
- 100 strokes. Stroke your child's head or back as they go to sleep and with each stroke, tell them something you love about them.
- Develop an attitude of gratitude with your children, and have a gratitude minute each night.
- Keep a "warm and fuzzy" file – into this put all the certificates your child receives, special thank you cards, meaningful notes and emails from friends and family, etc.
- Make requests in the positive (e.g. "please look where you are going when you jump off that wall," not, "don't fall".)
- Share some of your dreams and aspirations together – the big and the small ones. After all, how can you have a dream come true unless you have a dream? ☺

POSTER GIVEAWAY

Channel Publishing has four sets of A+ Attitude posters, designed by Janice Davies, to give away to schools. To enter the draw, send the name, address and phone number of your school to Parent and School Today Poster Draw, Channel Publishing Group, PO Box 13 138, Christchurch, or email your details to win@channelpublishing.co.nz with Poster Draw in the subject line. Entries close October 10, 2007.

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Teachers get bullied, too

By Hadyn Olsen

Mention bullying at school and people naturally think of something that happens between children. However, bullying is just as much a problem facing teachers.

Teachers appear to be one of the highest targets of workplace bullying, both here in New Zealand and internationally. Not only do they face bullying from students and parents, but from other staff as well.

How does bullying show up amongst teaching staff? The most common forms of bullying that teachers face from students include physical assaults, verbal abuse, threats and intimidation, and there is also growing concern about cyber bullying.

Bullying by parents toward teachers includes the use of intimidation, threats, verbal abuse and having unfair or malicious complaints made about them.

Bullying by teachers towards each other includes intimidation and verbal abuse, public criticism and humiliation, unfair blame and criticism, unfair performance appraisals and investigation of complaints, unjustified interference, and isolation from support, communication

and information. A survey by the Australian Catholic University found that 97.5 per cent of teachers had experienced bullying in their career. The researchers believe that bullying amongst teaching staff is as common as bullying experienced by students. Australia's University of New England is now hosting an online survey for teachers, which can be found at www.schoolbullies.org.au.

Why is teacher bullying such a problem? Partly, it is because of the silence that surrounds the issue. Teachers are expected to put up with bullying. Teachers are not meant to complain. They are somehow meant to be impervious to the destructive behaviour of others. Teachers are isolated and suffer in silence most of the time.

Schools need to combat this issue. It needs to be part of a comprehensive bully-prevention programme employed by every school. Everyone at school deserves to work in a safe environment. ☺

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Dealing with the issue

Wherever workplace bullying takes place, it is a serious issue. The specific circumstances and extent of the bullying will determine what course of action is most appropriate.

Some options for people who feel they are a victim of bullying include:

- Self-help. This involves letting the bully know that the behaviour is offensive and unacceptable, and needs to be addressed. This method may involve telling the person directly, or writing a confidential letter to them.
- Informal procedures. This involves getting another party involved, usually a manager or other senior staff member who can resolve the situation. This process will most likely involve the senior staff member interviewing both parties and determining the facts of the situation. Mediation can then take place and a peaceful resolution may be able to be reached.
- Formal procedures. In more severe cases of workplace bullying, informal mediation will not be appropriate. To make a formal complaint, bullying victims should put the specific details of the incident(s) in writing. Details that should be included are: what happened (including time, date, place, people, what was said and done), the impact of the bullying,

the names of any witnesses, and what action the complainant wants taken. This letter should be directed to the manager who will then take the appropriate action.

In more severe cases of workplace bullying, informal mediation will not be appropriate

- If this does not achieve a satisfactory result for the complainant, he or she can then lodge a formal grievance under the Employment Relations Act or to the Human Rights Commission. Both the Human Rights Act of 1993 and the Employment Relations Act 2000 promote internal mediation as the first course of action.
- If the bullying is of a criminal nature, the police should be contacted immediately. ☺

For more information, contact:
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W | www.dol.govt.nz
P | 0800 20 90 20, or **Workplaces Against Violence in Employment**
W | www.wave.org.nz
P | 0800 ZEROBULLY