

Healthy Minds Lincolnshire

Self-Esteem

A support pack for parents/ carers

What is self-esteem?

Self esteem is the opinion we have of ourselves. When we have good self esteem we feel happy and have confidence and belief in ourselves. We are better able to manage life's ups and downs. When we have low self esteem we tend to be more critical of ourselves and feel less able to manage the challenges of life.

If your child has low self-esteem, they might find it difficult to recognise what they are good at and identify what they like about themselves.



What causes low self-esteem?

Low self-esteem often begins in childhood. Teachers, friends, siblings, parents, and even the media send us positive and negative messages about ourselves.

There are lots of life experiences that can cause low self-esteem and impact how we feel about ourselves, such as:

- Stressful life events
- Comparing yourself to others
- How others respond to you, e.g. they may make hurtful comments about the way you look or act
- Being bullied or teased
- Family break ups
- Arguing with friends
- Physical health problems
- Concerns about our body image or how we look
- Not being listened to
- Social media

Core beliefs

When your child experiences negative or hurtful experiences, the thoughts and feelings can tend to stick. These experiences can then become beliefs (or what we call 'core beliefs') that the child has about themselves. These beliefs might include statements such as 'I'm stupid', 'I'm ugly', 'I'm not good enough'.



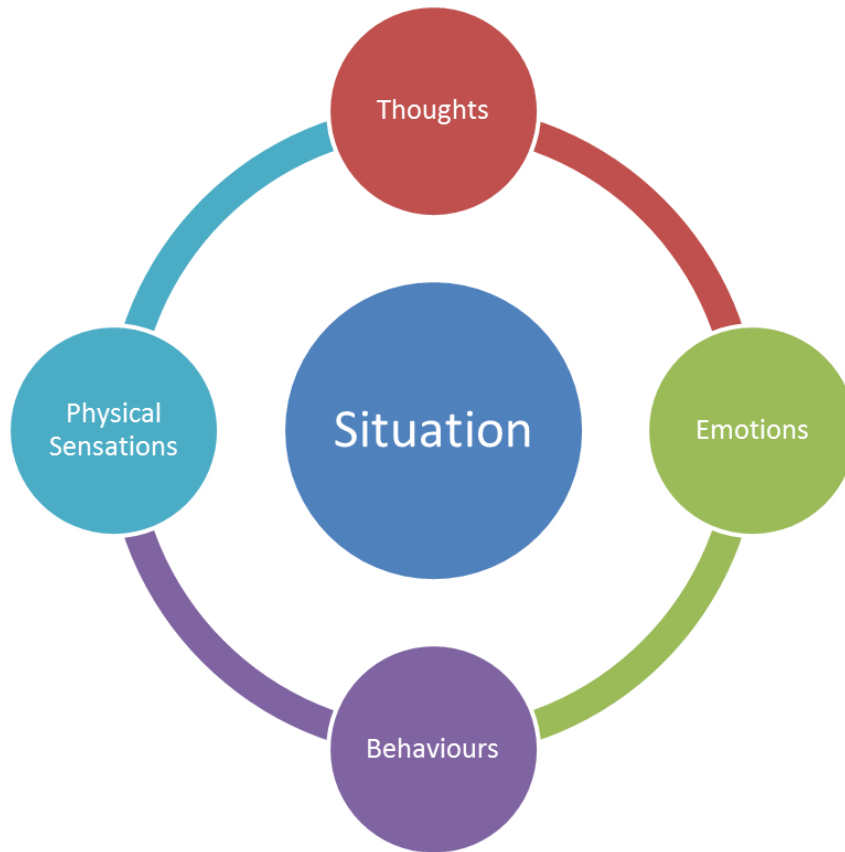
Impact of low-self-esteem

If your child has low self-esteem they might avoid social situations or things they find challenging and they may stop trying new things.

In the short term, avoiding challenging and difficult situations might make your child feel safe. However, longer term, this can reinforce underlying doubts, fears and negative core beliefs. A child might learn that the only way to cope is by avoiding things.

What keeps the low self-esteem going?

Our beliefs about ourselves can become stronger over time. Through exploring situations that trigger our thoughts, feelings, behaviour and physical sensations we can explore what keeps our core beliefs going. Healthy Minds Lincolnshire recommends using the 5 areas cognitive behavioural model to understand and explain what keeps the low self-esteem going.



(Padesky, 1986)

Situation – What might trigger feeling bad about themselves? Explore situations that the young person has experienced or is avoiding.

Thoughts – Can the young person recognise the thoughts that they are having in relation to that situation? E.g. I am useless, nobody likes me, something bad is going to happen.

Emotions – What emotions are they experiencing? Are they feeling sad, lonely, angry, disappointed?

Physical Reactions – What physical sensations are they experiencing? Do they feel tired, generally unwell, suffer from frequent headaches or often feel sick? Or do they describe sensations such as butterflies in their tummy, a racing heart, shaking hands?

Behaviour – What is the resulting behaviour? Are they avoiding situations? Have they stopped doing activities they used to enjoy? Are they showing more irritability through a short temper, arguing more with others etc.?

So, how can you help?

Talk to your child

Tell them that you have noticed they seem to be feeling unhappy. Ask them if they would like to talk about it and ask them how you can help. They may already know what will help but haven't felt able to ask.



Listening and validation

When talking to your child try not to jump in and solve everything for them immediately. Just listen at first and validate how they are feeling. Validation is the recognition and acceptance of another person's thoughts, feelings, sensations, and behaviours as understandable. Try to understand what is going on for your child in a non-judgemental way. Show that you understand by reflecting back what they are saying or guessing at how they may be feeling. E.g. 'you must be feeling sad that your friend couldn't come over this weekend. I think I would feel that way too'.

A great example of validation can be found in a video clip of the film Inside Out, which you can watch here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QT6FdhKriB8> If you have not received this document electronically, simply type 'inside out validation clip' into Google and the YouTube video will appear in the search results.

Help your child to understand what is going on for them

Use the 5 area model above to explore thoughts, feelings, behaviours and physical sensations. Help your child to pick any thoughts and behaviours that are unhelpful and help them come up with some different, more positive thoughts or look at changing some behaviours that might be keeping the problem going.

Act as a role model

Your child is always watching what you do. They see how you handle stress, how you treat others, how you treat yourself and how you manage your feelings. Even when you think your child isn't paying attention, it's essential to be a positive role model.



Diet, Sleep and Exercise

It is important to remember that physical health and mental health is closely linked. For example -If we don't eat a balanced diet we may end up with vitamin deficiencies that can leave you feeling lethargic and depressed, if we don't sleep sufficiently we feel tired and emotional and this can lead to problems both physically and mentally.

Diet - modern diets are often high in sugars, fats and salt and low in fibre, essential fatty acids and vitamins and minerals.

- * Children should eat a balanced diet of three meals a day including breakfast.
- * Try and avoid artificial additives, reduce pre-prepared meals and takeaways.
- * If you find it difficult to get your child to eat a balanced diet consider a multi-vitamin and mineral supplement and essential fatty acids (Omega 3)



See the NHS Eat Well guide for more information: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/the-eatwell-guide/>



Sleep - children and young people need significantly more sleep than adults to support their rapid mental and physical development. Sleep routine is important for us all to feel refreshed and motivated. Encourage your child to go to bed at the same time each night and to get up at the same time each morning. To get a good night's sleep it needs to be dark – ban electrical equipment from being used in the bedroom. As well as being over stimulated, light from this equipment prevents melatonin production which the body makes to control our natural sleep/wake cycles.

Children age 6-13 need 9-11 hours of sleep a day, Teenagers should have between 8 and 10 hours sleep. See: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness/healthy-sleep-tips-for-children/> for more advice.

Exercise - We all know that exercise and physical activity is beneficial for our physical health. It helps us maintain a healthy weight, strengthens our bones, muscles and internal organs and reduces the risk of some disease. Exercise also increases our ability to deal with stress, gives us more energy and improves our sleep. When you are active your brain releases endorphins which can calm anxiety and lift your mood. See: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/physical-activity-guidelines-children-and-young-people/> for more advice.

Support your young person to use specific strategies – the Healthy Minds practitioner you have had contact with may have sent you/your young person some more specific strategies that can help to manage anxiety and worries. Help your young person to practice these strategies regularly. And remember, it is ok to have set backs and forget to use strategies at times. Be kind to yourself and your young person and keep going!

See: <https://www.lpft.nhs.uk/young-people/lincolnshire/young-people/helping-you-help-yourself> for lots more useful information.