

## **SELF-ESTEEM – “Yes I Can!”**

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Self-esteem is our sense of worth. It comes from all of the thoughts, feelings, sensations, and experiences we have collected about ourselves through life. The view of self and a sense of self-esteem develop gradually beginning in infancy.

Our identity – how we view ourselves and how others view us – is first fashioned in our family unit when we are small children. As we grow, mature, and change, so does our identity. With each change, we hope to become closer to our real self.

As a child develops, learns language, gathers experiences, and senses how others react to him/her (especially Mother and Father), a sense of self is built. The parents' first reactions will form the seed of self that is built. If this seed is of a positive nature, the child's feeling of self will be healthy and strong. If the view is negative, the child may begin life with a sense of unworthiness.

Parents are “models” for their children. Children often copy parents' feelings, attitudes, language, mannerisms, and values. What goes on inside of a parent's mind and heart is as much a reference point to the child, as what goes on outside. Consequently, if a parent is struggling with self-esteem after a death/divorce of a spouse, so may the child. Children who possess low self-esteem may become handicapped emotionally. When children have low self-esteem, their behavior reflects it. As patterns develop that are characteristic of low self-esteem, they may become habits that are hard to change. We tend to behave according to how we view ourselves and our own sense of self-esteem. Then the behavior validates the self-view we already have. Some examples could be sloppy dressing, messy rooms, misbehavior in school, discipline problems, low grades, detentions, etc.

When there is a death or divorce in the family, it shakes the foundation upon which our identity was built. We begin to question who we are and whether we have changed ourselves as a result of our family unit having been altered. And, we become unsure how to relate to family members and friends after the change.

Possibly, throughout our lives we have been covering up or denying our real selves. We pretended to be what we thought others wanted us to be. It is important to find our personal identity, our true selves within and then to understand the beauty of our uniqueness. It is essential to our emotional wellbeing and sense of inner peace to be honest selves. Now, more than ever, we need to believe that we are someone separate and distinct from others - someone with worth and purpose.

Self-esteem is the basis for positive growth in human relations, learning, creativity, and personal responsibility. It is the cement that binds children's personalities together into positive, integrated, and effective structures. A strong sense of self-esteem is one of the most valuable resources a child can have. Children, as well as adults, who feel good about themselves, feel good about life. They are able to meet challenges and responsibilities of life with confidence. A child with good self-esteem will have a clear sense of direction and will enter adulthood with a large part of the sound foundation needed to lead a productive, rewarding life. It is an inner strength that, once firmly established, the child can rely on for life.

Often adults who have experienced the death or divorce of a spouse have a blurred sense of self-esteem. Consequently, we are unable to assist our children in building their own self-esteem. It is imperative as a new family unit that we work together to encourage one another, compliment our strengths, support our weaknesses, and rebuild our feelings of self-worth.

As we search to find the real “me”, we will discover that we all have our own qualities and gifts; that we all have the inner strength to become the best person we can be; that we are similar to and different from one another; and that we are all terrific human beings just because we exist. Where we live, how we dress, our possessions, or our accomplishments are secondary to who we are inside.