

Boosting teenagers' self-esteem

Time _____ to _____ (20 mins)

Equipment needed

- PowerPoint slides 2.12 to 2.13

Talk about

Self-esteem means the way you feel about yourself deep down.

A teenager with good self-esteem will be able to:

- Take pride in what they do
- Act independently
- Assume responsibility for their actions
- Tolerate frustration better

Self-esteem is fragile and easily damaged, especially during the teenage years.

With all the pressures of growing up, all teenagers will struggle at times with feelings of low self-esteem.

A teenager with low self-esteem is more likely to:

- Put down their talents and abilities
- Avoid trying new things
- Blame others for their shortcomings
- Find it hard to tolerate frustration
- Feel emotionally indifferent
- Be influenced by others

Self-esteem can also be knocked by things like bullying, racism, ill-health, special educational needs, troubles within the family or struggling with schoolwork.

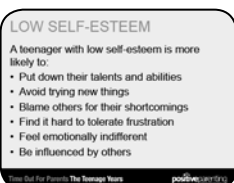
If teenagers feel really low, especially for long periods of time, they may 'act out' their feelings through:

- Angry outbursts or violence
- Abusive language towards parents or figures of authority
- Misuse of alcohol or drugs, smoking or having sex early
- Attention-seeking behaviour, e.g. skipping school
- Reduced attainment at school
- Getting into trouble
- Self-harming

Young people don't like themselves for behaving like this, and may even hate themselves underneath. They need lots of understanding.



Slide 2.12



Slide 2.13

If your teen seems unusually moody or withdrawn, or you notice a significant change in their habits, seek professional help. Teenage depression can be treated, but often goes undiagnosed.

Note: Some parents in the group may already have noticed this type of behaviour in their teen and may ask more questions. Be sensitive to their needs and signpost parents who need further support to Young Minds, Freephone 0808 802 5544 or they can visit www.youngminds.org.uk.

It can be easy to focus on all the things we don't like about our teenagers; hair, clothes, untidiness, manners and loud music. It's helpful to remind ourselves that these things are often an expression of teenage culture, which has to be different to ours. Remember identity and independence! We need to find things we can praise and we need to focus on their achievements.

Young people cope better if they have a positive relationship with at least one parent, and if the family provides some structure and security.

They need to know there is someone to talk to – no matter what has happened.

We can show them we love and accept them, even if we don't always like what they do.

Focus on their achievements, not their mistakes. Catch them doing something good.

Look for specific things you can praise:

- Sense of humour – making you laugh
- Being loyal to friends
- Being helpful
- Keeping going when it's tough
- Owning up

Activity

Split the parents into groups of three or four and ask them to discuss the following question.

What can parents do or say to boost their teen's self-esteem?

Give the small groups time to discuss and then ask for feedback. Write any suggestions on flip chart paper.

Ideas

Time

Stop what you are doing and give your teen undivided attention.



One lad was being disruptive at school. Although his dad was busy, he decided he needed to give his son more time. They went swimming every weekend and very soon the boy's behaviour improved. He felt important in his dad's life.

A mum was desperate to know how to improve the relationship with her 12-year-old son. Although she didn't enjoy football, she arranged to take him to a local match. He was pleased and very surprised that she had bothered.

Praise

Praise that is specific is more meaningful and effective than general words of affirmation. For example:

- "I really appreciate the way you cleaned your room without being asked."
- "You are a very kind person."
- "I liked how you accepted it when I said "No", and didn't lose your temper."
- "You're great the way you stick up for your friends."
- "I like the way you stick at things even when it's difficult."



Overheard praise

This can be less embarrassing than being told face-to-face. How about speaking positively about them to someone else when talking on the phone, when you know they can hear?

Talk about

What if the parent/child relationship is going from bad to worse?

You are the parent, so it has to start with you! You can't change your child, you can only change yourself. If you work hard at rebuilding the relationship (even if you don't feel like it), using some of the ideas we have talked about, things should ease a bit. Some parents have found it helpful to say "Sorry" if they feel they have said or done things they regret.

Children are remarkably forgiving if they feel we are being sincere. You may even get a hug!