



The WCPA News

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DEBUNKING THE MYTH OF SELF-ESTEEM, by Brett Newcomb, M.A., L.P.C.

Parents and educators are perennially concerned about an elusive concept we call self-esteem. There are many books written and curricula established around the goal of creating, augmenting, or facilitating the development of self-esteem in children. Frequently, we hear implications that children are fragile and easily wounded and therefore we need to be exceptionally vigilant to stroke and praise them and to avoid saying things that might cause emotional injury or lead to their failure to succeed. It is argued that we, the adults, need to be sensitive to and aware of all sources of negative feedback that our children receive and to run interference so that the impact of negative feedback is minimized or avoided altogether and their self-esteems can remain solid. These are mistakes.

Self-esteem means feeling at peace with yourself because you have a sense of who you are, and that person is capable, positive, and functional. Those people with high self-esteem can impact their environment to generate results that satisfy them! It is a manifestation of what we call healthy narcissism. When children fail to get what they want or to do what they want, it challenges their senses of grandiosity and causes them discomfort and anger. Those moments of discomfort and anger are what we call “teachable moments” for the parent and the school. What skills and resources can we help the child to tap into so that they pick themselves up, dust themselves off, and re-engage?

In the development of true self-esteem:

1. Children must be allowed to fail.
2. Children must develop an internal locus of control (a belief that they are the author of their own life; that they can create success through making good choices and taking responsibility for those choices.)
3. Children must develop the capacity for delayed gratification and impulse control.
4. Children must experience the consequences of their behavior – both positive and negative.
5. Children must learn to submit to discipline and rules.
6. Children must learn to work for what they want.
7. Praise matters, but...
8. Children must have opportunities to experience internal satisfaction for doing well and achieving their own goals.

Examining this list, one might ask, “What does failure have to do with self esteem?” Children need to experience small successive failures in order to develop resilience and learn from their mistakes. If our children do not learn to bounce when they fall, they do not learn resilience. Then when they are grown up and fall for the first time, the cost for failure will be exponentially higher. We do not want our children to experience their first failures in their ability to get what they want when those failures are, indeed, very expensive.

How can we as adults promote real self-esteem within the children in our lives? Parents and schools need to establish rules and procedures which are supported by consequences, and then those consequences must be consistently and fairly applied. Discipline is essential to the establishment of healthy self-esteem, yet initially discipline is externally imposed. Children experience it as consequences. We must not fall prey to the temptation of only offering our children positive reinforcements and rewards. If they get a reward every time they attempt something, they soon learn only to

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work for rewards. They never experience the internalization of drive, discipline, and motivation as well as the satisfying experience of success and mastery. Children must be allowed to experience the frustration of failure and negative consequences that motivate them to try again, try differently, try harder to master the situation. As they learn to do this, they internalize their consequences as self-discipline and thereby develop genuine, usable, positive self-esteem!

Unfortunately, our culture generally is one which does not like negative consequences. We live in a society that likes the quick fix. We protect our children too much and give in to their demands and expectations too easily. Our schools are too focused on making every child: win, comfortable, happy, and have good grades. This is neither in the best interest of the individual child nor of our culture at large. Instead, we must work to socialize children to be capable, functional and independent. That is more likely to happen if they have internalized discipline, a drive to overcome frustration by learning to master situations and circumstances, and a sense of competency. That is what we call real self-esteem!

FROM THE DIRECTOR

One of the topics for discussion that has been arising almost consistently in the last year, during principal consultation groups and Care Teams, has been the issue of Internet safety. I personally feel overwhelmed by the amount of information that I don't have about this subject. I often have the sense that I'm playing "catch-up" in an arena where realistically I may never "catch-up." However, I don't feel completely alone. Our children and students are much smarter than most of us will ever be in this area. Their minds have already been wired to use this form of communication.

My biggest concern is that families and schools are presented with a myriad of problems added to their already difficult jobs of monitoring our youths' behaviors. In regard to Internet safety as it pertains to children, there are the dangers of: giving personal information to people they meet online, arranging a face-to-face meeting with an online acquaintance, becoming a cyber-bully or being the victim of cyber-bullying, and allowing oneself to be in a vulnerable position by sending inappropriate information into cyberspace. Of course, these are only a handful of the many possible concerns. How do schools supervise students' Internet usage, especially when more and more schools are requiring laptops for their students? Do parents know how and with whom their children are communicating online? There are a number of programs that monitor and check what children are doing on their computers. Are our parents concerned enough, strong enough, and computer savvy enough to impose those blocks and checks on their children's computers?

It seems that in an age where e-mailing is becoming the preferred mode for communicating with both adults and children, there needs to be more face-to-face communication between parents and their children in regard to the children's Internet use and safety. There also needs to be more direct communication between our schools and our parents concerning helping the parents to become Internet knowledgeable and technologically responsible. Our parents need to be helped to realize that it is their responsibility to monitor their child's online behavior and safety. I wonder if we have yet to reach even the tip of the iceberg in looking at this problem.

-Mary

INTERNET SAFETY, by Michael E. Mahon, M.A., L.P.C.

There is a growing concern over what many parents and schools feel is fast becoming a major threat to young people in our society. That concern is about the Internet. While the Internet has become a tremendously useful tool and entertainment option, it can also be used to lure individuals, of any age, to behave in ways not consistent with their usual personalities and values.

The statistics coming out are shocking. A research study from 2003 found that one in four young people had experienced cyber-bullying. More news stories tell of young girls and boys who are lured from their homes and abused by someone they met on computer "chat". The reason for this is the accessibility the Internet offers as well as its anonymity. Individuals today can converse with any person in the world who has a computer and Internet access in real time. This is an incredibly useful application of technology. But it also means that individuals who want to prey on and hurt children have access to this technology as well. Add to this that an individual on the 'net has complete anonymity and this can become a recipe for disaster.

The average child or adolescent does not appreciate the danger involved and perhaps the average parent does not as well. Take, for example, an impromptu survey recently done at a local high school. The students were asked if they believed other people lie to them online, and the response was overwhelmingly no. When asked if they themselves occasionally lied online, the answer was unanimously yes. This is an example of how vulnerable children are online. They actually accept that the forty-two year old predator is the thirteen year old middle school student they claim to be. It is therefore easy to illicit information from the child such as their name, address or the school they attend. The predator is then just a short Internet search away from having directions to the child's house or school.

Many parents mistakenly believe that parental controls offered in their internet service providers package of resources is enough to keep their children safe, but this is just not true. These programs may block a trickle of objectionable material coming to the child's computer. It may allow the parent to block websites or "chat" partners from the child. These interventions are however, ineffective in the long run. Something as simple as misspelling an illicit word, (e.g., "sexxx") can often get a child around these minimal controls.

To truly keep children safe, takes a real and concerted effort on the part of parents and schools. For example, is the computer in a common room where an adult can easily monitor the activity on it or is it in the child's room hidden from view? Do parents make an effort to know where their child goes on the internet and whom they are talking to? Parents can easily enforce a "no minimizing" rule (the child is restricted from minimizing the computer screen to hide the contents) when the computer is in a common room. Parents can tell their children not to give out identifying information over the internet, even to people they may think are safe. Parents can buy software that allows them to view everything their children do online, with or without their children's knowledge. Parents can take proactive steps to reduce the risk children are exposed to online but it does require some effort.

It is becoming ever more important for parents, schools and children themselves to understand the threat and the need for Internet safety. WCPA has been researching this issue and has comprehensive common sense ideas on keeping children and schools safe. For more information or a faculty, parent or student presentation please contact our office.

Groups: What's Going On At WCPA

Social Skills: Social skills groups are currently being held at WCPA. Groups meet twice per month for ninety minutes at the WCPA office and offer a safe and educational opportunity for students to learn and grow. If you know of a student who has difficulty making or maintaining relationships with peers, lacks the ability to read social cues, reacts impulsively to situations, or simply needs to learn the basic skills to be socially successful, this group is an appropriate option. Students find reassurance knowing that they are not alone with their weaknesses and becoming empowered to make the changes necessary to deal with difficult situations and classmates. Space is limited but openings are available.

For further details or questions about either of these groups, please contact Tina Murphy at our office.