

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES
HELPING THE
CHILD WITH LOW
SELF ESTEEM

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HELPING THE CHILD WITH LOW SELF ESTEEM

- Self-esteem can have a significant impact on almost everything a student does — the way he engages in activities, the way he deals with challenges, the way he interacts with others. It can also have a marked effect on his academic performance. Low self-esteem may lessen a student's desire to learn, his ability to focus, and his willingness to take risks. Positive self-esteem on the other hand is one of the building blocks of school success and thus provides a firm foundation for learning.
- Your challenge in working with children with low self-esteem is to restore their belief in themselves so they persevere in the face of academic challenges. You do not need a formal program to promote self-esteem, however. You shape self-esteem every day in the course of interacting with your students. While you cannot teach your students to feel good about themselves, you can nurture their self-esteem through a continual process of encouragement and support. At its most basic, this means showing appreciation for the things your students do well, expressing confidence that they will improve in the areas where they don't do well, and adapting instruction so they can experience success.

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What Can You Do?

- I. Make sure to praise the student in a specific and genuine way. Students are expert at distinguishing genuine feedback from empty compliments. They learn to dismiss vague words of praise as insincere and perhaps even phony, but comments that suggest thoughtful appreciation of their work will be meaningful to them. Towards this end, let a student know in specific terms what you like about his work or behavior and, if he is progressing slowly, praise him for small steps forward. If you sense that he is uncomfortable being praised in front of his classmates, tell him in private or send him a note.

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What Can You Do?

2. Show the student tangible evidence of his progress. While expressing confidence in a student's ability is important, pep talks may not be enough. Help him appreciate his improvement by pointing to concrete signs of his growth, perhaps by taping his oral reading at the beginning of the year and comparing it to his later performance, showing him his papers from earlier in the year and contrasting them with later papers, or demonstrating how the math problems he struggled with first marking period now come so easily to him. You might also have him place index cards with spelling or reading words he has mastered in a box to document his growth.

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What Can You Do?

3. Showcase his accomplishments to his classmates. You might, for example, read one of his compositions to the class, display his artwork on the bulletin board, have him demonstrate how to do a math problem that you are confident he knows, or, if he is an ESL student, have him talk to the class in his first language. If he has a particular hobby or interest, suggest that he talk to the class about it. If necessary, have him rehearse in advance.

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What Can You Do?

4. Help the student feel important in class. You might give him classroom jobs or find ways that he can help others. Tell him that you are giving him this responsibility because you are confident he can do it well. Some examples: have him take care of the rabbit in the class; bring lunch money to the office; collect homework; help another student with a computer problem; read the school's morning announcements; answer the school phone while the secretary is at lunch; or tutor a student in a lower grade.

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What Can You Do?

5. Engage the student about his interests. A student can gain self-esteem from involvement in activities that he cares about. Find a few minutes every day to talk with him about his favorite hobbies, sports, television programs or musical groups. If necessary, ask his parents for this information to give you a basis for talking with him. Suggest ways he can pursue his interests in greater depth. You might even bring in a book or item from home related to one of his interests.

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What Can You Do?

6. Help the student deal with adversity. If he meets with academic difficulties, help him appreciate that failure is a normal part of learning and that everyone experiences disappointment or frustration at some point. You might tell him that Lincoln lost seven elections before being elected president or that Babe Ruth struck out 1,330 times during his career. Acknowledge his frustration but then move on to helping him develop strategies for improving. Express your confidence that with hard work and your support that he is likely to succeed.

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What Can You Do?

7. Encourage a sense of belonging. Students with low self-esteem are often isolated from their classmates. You can promote a student's peer involvement by finding ways to integrate him into activities either in or out of school. You might organize an activity for a group of students that includes him. Or you might ask a couple of friendly and accepting students to play with him during recess or invite him to eat lunch with them. If you have students pair up in class, assign him a kind and easygoing partner. You may also want to encourage his parents to arrange social contacts with classmates, perhaps suggesting potential playmates, or sign him up for community activities.

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What Can You Do?

8. Inform parents of their child's successes. While teachers are quick to let parents know when their child has a problem, they are not nearly as diligent about notifying them when he has a success. Consider sending a note home or calling them when their child does something noteworthy and tell the student you are doing this. This gesture may take you only a couple of minutes, but it can brighten the student's day and engender positive responses from the parents to their child.

- Adapted from:

Shore, K. (2020, September 17). *Helping the Child with Low Self Esteem*. Ken Shore.

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