

How to Help When Your Child Has Low Self Esteem

Children and adolescents with learning disabilities may experience a sense of failure and frustration. Academically they struggle. Teachers are more likely to rate their behaviour negatively (Tur-Kaspa & Bryan, 1995). Children/adolescents with learning disabilities are more likely to be ostracized and teased by peers than those children/adolescents without learning disabilities (Kistner & Gatlin, 1989). Therefore, it is not surprising that children and adolescents with learning disabilities may present with low self-esteem.



Feelings of low self-esteem can be manifested in a number of ways. First, children/teenagers may try to protect themselves by avoiding situations that are, in their experience, likely to end in failure. Thus, they may forget or leave homework undone and try to avoid school. In some cases, the prospect of going to school may make

the child/teenager feel physically ill. Second, the child or teenager may have difficulty acknowledging any problems. He/she may be unable to acknowledge his/her learning disability or may resist help with academic subjects. Socially, the child or teenager may say he/she prefers to stay at home rather than go out with friends, or may choose friends who have difficulties.



In order to help their sons/daughters deal with these issues, it is important that parents acknowledge and validate the child's/adolescent's feelings.

This is true when the emotions are positive and also when the feelings are painful. Telling a child/adolescent to ignore painful feelings may damage an already fragile self-esteem. Children/adolescents need to hear that their feelings are meaningful and justified. It may be difficult for parents to hear their child/teenager describe such painful and negative feelings. Acknowledging these negative

feelings, however, will be helpful to a child/adolescent in the long run.

There are things that parents can do to help build feelings of positive self-esteem. Parents can try to find something that their son/daughter is interested in and in which he/she demonstrates some competence. Once this area has been identified, the parent should try to find ways to enable the child/teenager to demonstrate his/her skills.

Parental praise is crucial to developing positive self-esteem.

Children and adolescents with learning disabilities are often acutely aware of their academic difficulties. It is important that parents ensure that their praise is genuine and meaningful. For example, when dealing with an area of academics with which the child/teenager has difficulty, parents might praise hard work and effort rather than outcome.





Integra, founded in 1967 by parents and professionals, is an accredited Children's Mental Health Centre dedicated to helping children and adolescents who experience social, emotional and behavioural problems related to their learning disabilities. We are a charitable organization administered by a Board of Directors comprised of dedicated volunteers from the community.

Integra has an experienced and multidisciplinary professional staff that is dedicated to creating and implementing a range of programs. Integra serves as a centre for research, practicum placement and continuing education.

Integra is committed to the promotion of a community-wide understanding of the mental health needs of children and adolescents who have learning disabilities, and to improving community-based services for them and their families. A range of clinical services is provided by Integra, as well as related activities in research and evaluation, and in training, consultation, collaboration and advocacy.

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TIPS FOR PARENTS

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