

Building boys' healthy self-esteem

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Part 1: Practical Guidance and Didactical Approach

Background and keywords:

Among boys we can see phenomena that we can name as socially undesirable or antisocial behaviour- e.g. violence, drug abuse, and aggression. When we look for sources of such phenomena we quite often see a connection with self-esteem.

There are many studies and research about the relationship between self-esteem and aggressive behaviour. Salmivalli (2001) describes a slight, albeit non-significant, tendency for bullies to have above average self-esteem. But the same study found that pro-social behaviour positively and significantly correlate with self-esteem level. Olweus (1978) compared the self-esteem of pre-adolescent boys identified as bullies with boys who were identified as victims of others' teasing and harassment, and of a control group consisting of well-adjusted children. Victims had a lower self-esteem than the control group and bullies had lower self-esteem than the control group children.

In other research it was found that levels of self-esteem significantly affect the level of aggression in women, the lower the self-esteem the higher the incidence of aggression. There is a different tendency in men. The highest aggression appears in those with low self-esteem, and in those with high self-esteem (Fleischmann, 2008). The lowest aggression occurs in men with average self-esteem. If we take into account the social expectation of boys- to be strong, courageous, be able to carry one's point and therefore be more dominant than girls in such ways, we expect boys to have high self-esteem which for many of them is very frustrating.

On the basis of these findings we see the importance especially in boys to create not simply high self-esteem but healthy and realistic self-esteem.

Key words:

High self-esteem; low self-esteem; healthy self-esteem; insecurity, defence; aggression.

Similar topics:

Self-concept; self-consciousness; self-confidence; self-worth.

Materials:

- Paper
- Pencils
- Magnetic table
- Magnets

Duration:

2 hours (2x1) in class or hobby group

Number of participants:

10 to 20 boys

Age:

9 till 11 years old boy's

Aims:

- To improve the overview of personality traits.
- To show the possibility of how to boost one's healthy self-esteem.

(Short) Explanation:

As it was mentioned in the background, individuals demonstrate specific behaviour in particular situations. They reflect the context of a situation to which they belong and they react. The whole process is enacted in the level of cognitions, emotions and behaviour. The reflection of "self" plays a very important part in the process, especially in the cognitive part of self-system (self-concept), the emotional part of self-system (self-esteem) and the global relation to individual as him or herself, so-called global self-esteem (self-confidence).

To be able to improve the quality of self reflection it is necessary to work on a "self-picture" or on the "self-map" which is made by the traits of personality and abilities. The more traits we know we have the better self-picture or self-map we are able to create. The self-picture consists mainly of positive and negative traits. Such self-picture we evaluate- positively or negatively and it makes the emotional part of self-system (self-esteem).

Self-esteem reflects our personal competence or incompetence. It means in what area, activity we are proficient or lacking. This view could be biased because it reflects the evaluation and expectations especially from the significant others.

So, our task is to make the corrections in self-view, self-picture and self-esteem to achieve and develop the proper and "healthy self-esteem". We come out of the principle of strengthening- we attend to desirable phenomena and reward them, we do not attend to phenomena we do not accept and when needed, we correct them.



(<http://www.region.peel.on.ca/health/commhlth/selfest/process.htm>)

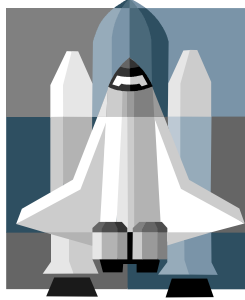
People around us often react to those things of which we are not perfect, on our mistakes, our bad behaviour etc. They focus on our negatives and thus they in effect strengthen them. The negative evaluation prevails over the positive one. In fact they "help" to create our own negative self-picture. The negative thoughts about us – and

sometimes the others- dominate over positive ones in our mind. We build our life scenario:

- I am bad- the others are good
- I am bad- the others are bad too (Berne, 1997)

To stop this way of thinking we orient boys to their positives. They should start to think over them and- of course- about themselves. By discovering their qualities they are on the way to building better a self-picture and better, healthy self-esteem. In fact boys change their life scenario to: I am good (not perfect) - the others are good too (not perfect).

Exercise: Explorer



Each boy is an explorer preparing himself for an adventurous expedition to a space station. But apart from practical equipment it is also necessary to take with something which can be useful for him that can help to him in difficult life situations- the personal traits. And there are many of them. Some are negative and some positive. The first task is to remind him of all the positive traits he has- to make a list of them. The second task is to make a list of negatives and to decide which of them he can leave at home and which he could take with him. The third task is to look after the positives, take care of them and expand them- boys need to think about them and so they stabilize their positives traits as a consequence.

Step 1:

Short discussion about positive and negative traits of personality.

E.g. "What is a personality trait?"
 "What does it mean to be a good or bad person?"

Step 2:

Each boy will write 5 positive and 5 negative traits.

Step 3:

We split the magnetic table into two parts


- left side	+ (positive traits)
- right side	- (negative traits)


Boys read their positive and negative traits and place each new trait in the particular part of the table with using magnets.

After finishing this task we make a "brain storm" of positive and negative traits which complete the "map of traits" and we put them in the table too.

Step 4:

Children start to make their own "map of traits". They write positives and negatives which they find out that they belong to them on the pre-prepared cards.

	MY POSITIVE TRAITS

	MY NEGATIVE TRAITS

Step 5:

Individual work:

We individually discuss with each boy their own "self map". This is done on a one-to-one basis to keep the discussion private as it is a personal experience. The aim of this important part is to reinforce the positive traits and eliminate the negative ones by using the "principle of strengthening".

1. We positively evaluate the positive traits:
 "Great; fine; good man;"
2. We enquire about the reasons for the negative traits.
 "Why do you think you are"?
3. We make an inquiry of level of acceptance of such negative traits.
 "Do you want to be so"?
 "Would you like to change it"?
 "What do you want to change most of all"?

Step 6

We focus on the negative traits and we work on them. We split those traits into three parts:

- negatives we can transfer;
- negatives we can accept;
- negatives we can eliminate by changing our behaviour.

Transmission

Conception and appreciation of some negative traits can be bias. Therefore we try to find other positives meaning in them. After that we relocate this "new" trait to the positive part.

E. g.:

Pig-headedness, being stubborn
Vacillation

consistency, pertinacity
carefulness, responsibility

Acceptance

Everybody has traits that are not changeable. Because nobody is perfect, we accept such traits. They make our personality varied, coloured.

Elimination

We choose the traits we do not want to have to and we try to eliminate them by way of changing our behaviour (e. g. we are often late- we change the time on our watches 15 minutes forward ...). Better to cooperate with professionals on this part.

Step 7

We support children in focusing on the good things they do in all their great qualities. They learn to love and accept themselves - the main ingredients for healthy self-esteem.

Reflection:

We can ask some questions, e. g.:

- What personal traits are characteristic for being "good person"?
- What defending strategies are typical for low or high self-esteem?
- What is characteristic of "healthy self-esteem"?

Variations (Continuation):

We should focus not only on personal traits. No less important is the evaluation of our competence. Here are some suggestions of how to improve the positive self-evaluation. The elimination of insecurity and self-defending strategies is one of the results of this process. And- finally- we develop the "healthy self-esteem".

Make a list of the things you are good at.

- It can be anything from drawing or singing to playing a sport or telling a good joke or stories. In case of trouble with making the list we help with it.
- Make a list of things you are not so good at.
- We are not perfect. It is alright to be "imperfect" or "incomplete" in some areas.
- Add a few things to the list that you would like to change and to be good at.
- We can help to make a plan a way to work on development of those skills or talents.
- Concentrate yourself on positive competence and aims.

- If you have any negative comments in your mind, just tell them STOP. Do not forget to give yourself at least one compliment every day ("I am so good"; "I did it very well"; "I can do it well").
- Remember that there are some things about yourself you cannot change.
- You should accept these things; such as: the colour of your eyes or clothes size- they are part of you. You are not perfect but on the other side you are not bad. You are alright boy!



Part 2: Theoretical Background and Further Information

When we ask how it is possible to eliminate such phenomena as aggression, bullying, hostile behaviour etc. we can besides other come out from humanistic psychology.

For instance Rogers says that individuals dispose of many vast inner potentials of self-understanding and transformation of self-concept, basic approaches and behaviour intent on own self. Rogers states that the individual is to a great extent creator, architect of himself, his own self. He views dimension of self-understanding as an important factor for behaviour prediction (in.: Rogers, 1998).

Also Franken (1994, p. 443) says that, perhaps, the self-concept is "the basis for all motivated behaviour. It is the self-concept that gives rise to possible selves, and it is possible selves that create the motivation for behaviour". He also suggests that self-concept is related to self-esteem that "people who have good self-esteem have a clearly differentiated self-concept" (Franken, 1994, p. 439).

The question is how to define self-esteem. In psychology self-esteem reflects a person's overall self-appraisal of their own worth. The original definition presents self-esteem as a ratio found by dividing one's successes in areas of life of importance to a given individual by the failures in them or one's "success / pretensions" (James, 1980, in Wikipedia encyclopedia).

Branden's (1969, in Wikipedia encyclopedia) description of self-esteem includes the following primary properties:

1. Self-esteem as a basic human need, i.e., "...it makes an essential contribution to the life process", "...is indispensable to normal and healthy self-development, and has a value for survival."
2. Self-esteem as an automatic and inevitable consequence of the sum of individuals' choices in using their consciousness.
3. Something experienced as a part of, or background to, all of the individual's thoughts, feelings and actions.

Huitt (2004) defines self-esteem as "the affective or emotional aspect of self". It generally refers to how we feel about or how we value ourselves. Johnson (1997, p. 8) defined self-esteem as "the degree of worth, value, respect of love and the individual may hold for himself as a human being in the world". Most often the concept of self-esteem is used to refer to a persons' global, overall evaluative view of oneself (Salmivalli, 2001).

When we speak about self-esteem we usually do it in terms of low or high self-esteem.

Low self-esteem is connected with anything negative and undesirable. People with low self-esteem for instance tend to speak negatively about themselves, they tend to be over critical and disappointed in themselves, they have low tolerance for frustration, they do not believe in their competence and so they often tend to avoid new things. In connection with aggression and violence the tendency to social sadomasochist behaviour can appear (Fromm, 1997). It means that they pose very submissively even as "masochists". They prostrate themselves and show how weak and obedient they are. Toward weaker persons they tend to be aggressive, dominant, and even sadistic.

High self-esteem fosters well-being and socially desirable behaviour (Salmivalli, 2001). People have positive attitudes about themselves, they positively evaluate themselves and they believe in their competences. In some cases we can see in high self-esteem a tendency to self-importance, uncritical self-acceptance, to self-love. Such high self-esteem can lead to aggression, violence and bullying too because of the need to defend the existing "high self-esteem". Those people feel insecure, having an inflated view of self. They feel vulnerable to threat or they fear to lose self-esteem at any moment. Baumeister et al. (1996, in Salmivalli, 2001) speak about "underlying self-doubts" which corresponds with high but unstable self-esteem. That is why we prefer "healthy self-esteem" to low or high self-esteem. Healthy self-esteem consists not only of seeing oneself in as positive a light as possible, or as perfect, but also of feeling intrinsically worthwhile, or accepting oneself as one is (Buss, 1995, p. 206). People with healthy self-esteem are able to assess themselves accurately because they know their positives and negatives, their strengths and limitations and still they are able to accept and value themselves realistically and unconditionally.

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