

SELF ESTEEM: OVERVIEW FOR PARENTS & CAREGIVERS

WHAT CAUSES LOW SELF-ESTEEM?

Every parent wants their child to feel good about themselves, but it is really common as kids hit adolescence for them to start feeling incredibly self-conscious. This is actually a normal and healthy part of the developmental process as they start seeing themselves more clearly, and facing decisions of how they want to live their lives. But when teenagers inevitably start experiencing all of the feelings of doubt and insecurity that arise at this age, they often become ashamed and shut down, assuming their feelings mean there is something WRONG with them.

HOW MIGHT SOCIAL MEDIA BE IMPACTING MY CHILD'S SELF-ESTEEM?

Self-esteem has always been a struggle for teenagers, but today's teens face even more of a challenge because of Social Media. There are many positive aspects of Social Media, such as helping teens stay connected and find people who share their beliefs and values. However, Social Media can also have negative consequences when it becomes a tool for self-judgement. Everyone puts their most positive image forward on Social Media, and it's very rare for people to show their struggles. Those that do post about struggle often do it in a way that is overwhelming. This dichotomy of perfect airbrushed pictures of beautiful people juxtaposed against dark and sometimes disturbing accounts of serious struggle paints a very black and white picture for teenagers in the world today. The underlying message they receive is that either their lives are perfect, or they must be devastating and hopeless.

WHY DON'T TEENS ASK FOR HELP IF THEY ARE STRUGGLING?

Teenagers usually assume that no one else feels insecure in the ways that they do, which makes them want to hide what they are feeling. They usually don't reach out for help to move through this phase, because they don't realize it's a phase! To them it seems like their struggles will last forever, and are due to a fundamental flaw in their character that cannot be "fixed".

TIPS FOR BOOSTING YOUR CHILD'S SELF-ESTEEM:

1. SOOTHE EMOTIONS

The best thing you can do as a parent is help your teenager relate to their feelings in a healthy way, so they know what is happening in them and when they need extra support. So when they are overwhelmed or in pain, encourage them to stop, feel their emotions, and let them pass. Validate and normalize what they are feeling by saying things like: "I'm so sorry you feel that way, it's really normal to feel sad when you're facing something hard."

2. CHANGE THOUGHTS

You can also help them notice any negative thoughts they have about themselves when they are experiencing strong feelings (for example they might be thinking they are 'worthless' because they feel sad). Remind them that our thoughts naturally become negative and irrational when we are in a strong difficult emotion and that once the feeling passes, so will these thoughts.

3. TAKE ACTION TO HELP THEMSELVES

When they are calm, help them reflect on where their feelings might be coming from, and what these feelings might be signaling about their needs. For example, if they are sad because of a difficult situation they are facing, maybe it's time to think about whether they need some extra help or support to get through it.