

# Self-esteem

Self-esteem is one's awareness of one's own worth in various areas. It also implies recognition of both one's strengths and one's weaknesses and personal limitations. Youth gain awareness of their worth through interactions with their parents, friends, teachers, and other significant adults. Young people who are confident in their skills and abilities will not hesitate to engage and persevere in learning activities. On the other hand, youth who have difficulties, encounter failure, and lose confidence in their abilities may avoid engaging in schoolwork in order to protect themselves and maintain a positive self-image.

## What the research says

Self-esteem, also called one's "self-concept," is not considered either a positive or negative factor in school performance. Rather, it is seen as a reflection of previous successes and failures at school. It is therefore unlikely that by trying to increase a young person's self-esteem, one will directly improve the student's academic results. However, it is almost certain that if the way is opened for students to get better grades, their self-esteem will improve.

Self-concept is multi-faceted. Researchers<sup>1</sup> agree that it is preferable to consider self-concept that is specific to certain areas of activity rather than a general self-concept. A young person may have a very positive social or professional self-concept but have a negative scholastic self-concept. And it is this scholastic self-concept that is most closely related to school performance. In order to help more young people stay in school and succeed, it is therefore more effective to take action on scholastic self-concept than on overall self-esteem.

On the other hand, Martinot<sup>2</sup> asserts that self-concept is closely related to self-awareness and that good self-awareness makes it easier to set realistic goals that are less likely to end in failure. In addition, positive self-concept, regardless of whether it is scholastic, professional, or social, fosters physical and mental health. Thus, because they affect motivation and one's sense of capability and adaptability, having numerous successful self-concepts is a favourable condition for perseverance and effort at school.

In short, acting on self-esteem and on overall self-concept will not directly affect school perseverance and success but will positively reinforce factors of success, which subsequently contribute to young people's success by allowing them to develop a sense of capability in difficult situations and to have confidence in their abilities, while at the same time protecting against depression.

Self-esteem → Motivation → Engagement and effort → Feeling of capability

Physical and mental well-being

### For more information

*Les enfants et l'estime de soi*

[http://www.cmha.ca/fr/mental\\_health/les-enfants-et-lestime-de-soi/](http://www.cmha.ca/fr/mental_health/les-enfants-et-lestime-de-soi/)

*L'estime de soi chez l'enfant*

[http://naitreetgrandir.com/fr/etape/1\\_3\\_ans/comportement/fiche.aspx?doc=ik-naitre-grandir-comment-batir-confiance-estime-de-soi-enfant](http://naitreetgrandir.com/fr/etape/1_3_ans/comportement/fiche.aspx?doc=ik-naitre-grandir-comment-batir-confiance-estime-de-soi-enfant)

[1] J.-A. Gueyoud and C. Dessa (1998), La configuration des corrélations entre le concept de soi et le rendement scolaire : une méta-analyse, *Revue des sciences de l'éducation*, 24(2) 299–332. Downloaded at: <http://www.erudit.org/revue/rse/1998/v24/n2/502013ar.pdf>

[2] D. Martinot (2001), Connaissance de soi et estime de soi : ingrédients pour la réussite scolaire, *Revue des sciences de l'éducation*, 27(3) 483–502. Downloaded at: <http://www.erudit.org/revue/rse/2001/v27/n3/009961ar.pdf>

## Taking effective action

To improve young people's scholastic self-concept, then, one must prioritize actions that help them experience success at school. All efforts must converge towards this goal. Obviously, the most direct way to achieve this is to act on the pedagogical approaches used in class and on student-teacher relations.

A recent study conducted in the Estrie region indicates that focusing special attention on a school's pedagogical practices and on following up on results with students contributes the most to reducing failure rates.<sup>1</sup> Implementing and maintaining a harmonious, safe, and respectful environment for students also contributes to improving their grades.

Given that to intervene more effectively on overall self-concept, and to help youth develop numerous self-concepts associated with success, it would appear to be equally important to involve parents on a daily basis, since self-esteem is useful in all areas of a student's life.

### Avenues for effective action related to self-esteem

#### Guide parents in fostering the development of their child's self-esteem:

- to establish clear rules and expectations that allow children to experience success at home and at school (logical consequences rather than punishments, expectations rather than criticism, etc.);
- to promote conflict-management based on openness, empathy, and expression of emotions;
- to implement activities that stimulate and develop academic skills (help with homework, vocabulary development, talking about subjects brought up in class, etc.);
- to create harmonious relationships with children (positive reinforcement, listening, validation of the child's strengths, respect, acceptance of mistakes, means and strategies, etc.);
- to prepare children for difficulties and transitions by helping them find ways to minimize stress and anxiety, to find solutions, and to make choices (possible choices, pros and cons, trial and error, etc.);
- to help children set goals and make the effort required to achieve them (realistic goals, steps toward achieving them, finishing a project, etc.);
- to lead children toward autonomy (encouraging them to try things, allowing them to do things imperfectly, etc.).

#### Implement activities outside the school that promote student success at school:

- to allow them to do their homework (mentoring, homework help, remediation, etc.);
- to give them a chance to take part in hands-on motivating projects related to a school subject (newspaper, model, film, cooking, recipe book, etc.);
- to establish clear rules and expectations that allow children to experience success (logical consequences rather than punishments, expectations rather than criticism, etc.);
- to allow youth to feel a sense of worth before their peers by putting their skills, expertise, and strengths to good use;
- to allow youth to develop a sense of belonging at school and positive friendships (extracurricular activities, shows, contests, fieldtrips, travel, etc.);
- to build harmonious relationships between youth and adults at school (positive reinforcement, listening, respect, etc.);
- to promote conflict management based on listening and empathy.

[1] P. Colletette, D. Pelletier, and G. Turcotte (2013), *Relations entre les pratiques de gestion des directions d'écoles secondaires et les résultats des élèves*. Study funded by the Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation in research by the Université de Sherbrooke, Chaire de recherche de la Commission scolaire de la Région-de-Sherbrooke sur la réussite et la persévérance des élèves.