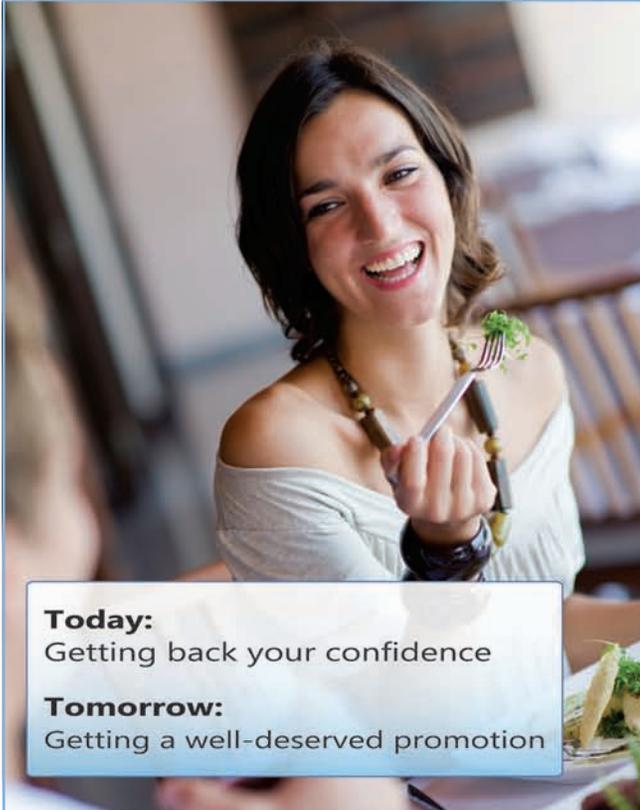


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Self Esteem Tips for Teens

By Dr. Jenn Berman



We all want our kids to have great self esteem but now, more than ever, it seems like the culture we live in is antithetical to good self worth. Our culture seems to value material items over good deeds, beauty over intelligence, and superficial actions over meaningful accomplishments.

Teens with great self esteem are secure, strong and independent people who, with your help, can grow up to be confident adults. What makes good self esteem? Kids with good self esteem have:

- Confidence in their ability to cope with challenges
- Belief in their ability to be successful and happy
- Feelings of being worthy, deserving and entitled to assert their needs and desires
- A sense of mastery
- A sense of self which leads to an understand-

ing of what is important to the individual

- The ability to pick people who support and encourage them
- The ability to recover from failure
- An understanding of their strengths and weaknesses

The teenage years are a great time of change. A teen's most important tasks are developing autonomy, creating self-determination, and learning to individuate. Often these tasks seem at odds with their parents' tasks. As Haim Ginott said in his book *Between Parent and Teenager*, "As parents, our need is to be needed: as teenagers their need is to not need us. Their conflict is real; we experience it daily as we help those we love become independent of us." When we do our job well and we help our teens to develop good self esteem, we prepare to



send them off to college prepared to cope with the challenges they are bound to face.

Here are a few of the tips to share with the teens in your life.

Make small, manageable goals. You will feel much better about yourself if you set a smaller, more manageable goal and achieve it rather than setting a huge goal and not accomplishing it. Each time you complete what you set out to do, you alter your view of yourself. You become someone who expects to accomplish her goals and keeps her promises to herself.

Talk back to your “unhealthy voice.” We all have a “healthy voice” and an “unhealthy voice.” They are kind of like the angel and the devil that sit on Bart Simpson’s shoulders. An unhealthy voice will tell you that you are not good enough for that girl to say “yes” to go to the prom with you, or that you are

not smart enough to pass that test. Start talking back to that voice, even if you don’t believe it at first. Over time it will make a difference.

Spend time with people who bring out the best in you and build you up. Spending time with people who criticize you, are mean or don’t make you feel good will erode your self esteem. You will start to internalize the messages you get from these people and it can tear you down.

Work to find your passions in life. Finding something that you love and are good at can be self defining. Knowing that you can walk across the balance beam without falling down, hit the ball across the field, paint a beautiful picture or sing a song that makes people’s faces light up can enhance self esteem. Finding your passion is like finding a piece of yourself that makes you more whole.

Don’t make another person responsible for your self esteem. “If you base your identity on having friends, being accepted, and being popular, you may find yourself compromising your standards or changing them every weekend to accommodate your friends,” says Sean Covey author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*. Basing your identity on another person’s approval is a fast way to feel bad. This is especially common with boyfriends and girlfriends. While it is great to experience that first love, being dependent on that person to feel good is a bad sign. Furthermore, the more you center you life around someone, the less attractive you become to them.

Whenever you find yourself being self critical say three positive things. In sports psychology we often advise coaches to give three positive feedback comments to every one negative

comment, because studies show that athletes only hear the negative with any fewer positives. Giving ourselves three positives for every negative helps us to shift our negative and critical thinking.

Take contrary action. Sometimes doing the opposite of what we feel like doing can help get us out of a bad rut. If you feel like staying in bed and sleeping late, instead get up and go for a walk with a friend.

Help others. One of the best inoculations against poor self esteem is to help others. Being of service is a great reminder that we can make a difference in the world.

*Dr. Jenn, a licensed psycho-therapist in private practice, is the author of *The A to Z Guide to Raising Happy Confident Kids and SuperBaby: The 12 Ways Parents Can Give Their Child a Head Start in the First Three Years*. She lives in Los Angeles with her husband and children. www.DoctorJenn.com.*