

Introduction

Each activity in this pack is designed to contribute in some way to the enhancement of self-esteem. Some activities are short, fun and light-hearted while others are more thoughtful and demanding. They offer a variety of approaches so that every participant, of whatever age, will have an opportunity to discover something about his or her personal growth and development.

Some early experiences in life can have a devastating effect on the possession of healthy self-esteem. Teachers and group leaders can help to counter this by giving pupils a chance to learn to be at ease with themselves and others, to form positive beliefs and habits, and to discard negative ones. The staff contribution to the well-being and contentment of their pupils will then be very evident. This pack is dedicated to them.

What is self-esteem?

Self-esteem is concerned not merely with pupils feeling good about themselves, but also about becoming positive and taking pride in themselves, their assets and accomplishments, and consequently developing a real sense of personal competence. Healthy self-esteem is based on both competence and self-respect. It can be defined as having confidence in one's ability to deal with life's challenges and also feeling worthy of respect, achievement and happiness. The five elements of self-esteem involve a sense of:

- security
- identity
- belonging
- purpose
- competence.

Strategies are called for to build self-esteem and these are best introduced in time set aside for this purpose. Self-esteem is as important as any other subject in the timetable, and an investment in this approach rapidly pays dividends.

Self-esteem and school achievement

Self-esteem is a key factor in the debate about strategies for raising pupil achievement. All successful schools, regardless of age range, size, buildings and catchment area, have one thing in common: the enhancement of the self-esteem of their pupils and staff.

Where self-esteem exists, school achievement will certainly be high. Research on the relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement shows a positive association: as the level of self-esteem increases, so do achievement scores, and as

have. If you are willing to express your feelings, acknowledge weaknesses as well as strengths, and display a healthy lifestyle, the positive impression you make will contribute enormously to your pupils' self-esteem.

Activity 6: Signatures



Distribute **Worksheet 2** (page 46) before starting this activity if necessary and read it aloud. **Worksheet 2a** (page 47) is designed for older pupils. Pupils will need a pen or pencil each. Ten minutes maximum is probably the right time limit for this activity. The intention here is to get a quick interaction between members of the group simply to make that important initial contact, so signatures are collected at speed on a 'yes/no' answer basis. Alternatively, the information collected could then be used to promote a discussion about the amount of common interests or different skills that are present in the group.



See if you can find people in the group who can sign their names against the questions on **Worksheet 2** (or **2a**). For example, for the first question, ask someone if they can skip. If they can, ask for their signature. That person can only sign your paper once, so you have to find others for the rest of the questions, but they can also sign other people's papers on that line if they wish. You cannot sign against any of the lines yourself. See how many signatures you can collect.

Activity 7: Things in common



- 1 Hold your hands up in the air and then put up any number of fingers and thumbs you choose, between one and ten.
- 2 Now, leaving out your best friends, because that would make this activity too easy, look around and find two other people who are showing the same number of fingers as you. When you see them, go and find a space and sit down together.
- 3 In your groups, find something all three of you have in common. They have to be unusual things, for example, you all have relatives living abroad or you went to the same place for a holiday. You will only have three minutes, so you have to talk fast. Each time you find something in common, shout 'Yes!' together in a loud voice before you go on to the next. When you have got to the tenth thing in common, shout 'Yes! Yes! Yes!' and then take a breather.
- 4 Alternatively, all three of you can jump up every time you have a 'Yes!' and on the tenth instance, add 'We've done it!'.

Art, craft and drama

Introduction

Time constraints should not militate against the use of the activities in this section because they serve a very useful purpose in building self-esteem. Practical methods, as in any other curriculum area, allow us to integrate our learning with the other experiences we have had in our lives. This is obviously important when dealing with personal growth and development.

The activities help to promote self-discovery and awareness, the first steps on the road to a healthy level of self-esteem. Showing photographs and disclosing personal details helps to build a sense of identity, which is a key element in self-esteem. Working together on issues agreed by the group enhances the desired sense of belonging. Photographs taken in school and then displayed, which show pupils working and playing, help to inculcate both identity and belonging.

Teachers need to be sensitive at all times to reactions that may occur during these activities. If a secure climate has been firmly established, where the adults are clearly displaying non-judgemental attitudes, pupils will begin to take emotional risks and these should be encouraged in order to allow them to grow. If feelings are exposed suddenly, they should be accepted, not stifled. An acknowledgement is all that is required and, if necessary, asking the pupils what support they need.

Any other subject, eg bullying, which has been brought up for discussion in the group is worth dealing with through art, craft and drama activities, as described in this section.

Activities

Activity 21: Personal collages

Equipment: Sheets of paper; scissors; paste; pens; a large quantity of magazines for the pupils to choose and cut out pictures from.



As an introduction, ask pupils to think about themselves, eg which feelings predominate, what their current interests and hobbies are, or what future ambitions they have. Ask them to look through the magazines and select photographs that they consider portray these feelings, interests and ambitions. The aim is to make a personal collage. For example, a pupil might choose a picture of a person smiling or looking serious because this is how they appear most of the time. They might choose pictures of people who have achieved something, or photographs of places they would like to visit or live. Open a magazine page at random and use it to encourage pupils to reflect on how the photographs might apply to them. Emphasise that the collage is completely open-ended. What the pupils put in or leave out is completely up

minute to do some breathing like this and you will find it helps. It is a good activity to practise so you will know how to do it when you need to.



Other words to describe pressure are: stress, upset, worry, anxiety, tension and strain. The group should sit on chairs for the breathing exercise.

Activity 34: Relaxation technique



When you are going to start some work or begin a project, it can be very helpful to start off by taking a few minutes to relax. If relaxation is done in the right way, it can really help you to get your energy fired up and your powers of concentration ready. If you are going to take a test, do something for the first time or go into a strange situation which you think might worry you, then relaxing in the following way can be a big help.

- 1 Put your body in the most relaxed position you can think of. Move around until you are comfortable. When you are ready, close your eyes.
- 2 Raise one arm, quite high, and make a fist with your hand at the same time. Raise the arm high and grip tightly until you can feel the tension. Hold it still.
- 3 Let it fall. Let it relax, completely supported. Feel all the tension drain out of it.
- 4 Lift your other arm now, high. Make a fist and grip tightly. Feel the tension. Hold it.
- 5 Let it go. Let it relax, feeling completely supported, all the tension slipping away.
- 6 Lift one leg. Straighten it. Stretch the toes. Feel the tension. Hold it.
- 7 Lower it. Let it relax, feeling completely supported.
- 8 Lift the other leg. Straighten it. Stretch the toes. Feel the tension. Hold it.
- 9 Lower it. Let it relax, feeling completely supported.
- 10 Now imagine your whole body lifting up, stretching and tensing everywhere. Hold it.
- 11 Relax completely. Let go, feeling completely supported.
- 12 Again, imagine the whole body lifting, stretching and tensing everywhere. Hold it.
- 13 Again relax completely. Let go, feeling completely supported.
- 14 Rest, relax, enjoy that feeling of well-being.
- 15 Pause.
- 16 Now I am going to count backwards from 10 to 1, and when I get to 1, open your eyes feeling relaxed, rested and alert.

Affirmations: Thinking positively

Introduction

Teachers and leaders need to get the message across that success does not mean being a genius; it merely means doing as best as you can. Genius means taking more trouble over things, more intelligently, more enthusiastically and more diligently than the competition; all the attributes of someone with high self-esteem. It may be necessary to stress that success does not equate to material possessions. These do not guarantee a lifetime of well-being and contentment. People with healthy self-esteem have other priorities.

A book which gives an excellent explanation of the impact of positive and negative thoughts is *Feel The Fear And Do It Anyway* (see page 56). To find out about visualisations and affirmations, read *Creative Visualization* or listen to *Picture This: Guided Imagery for Circle Time*.

Activities

Activity 46: Positive thoughts



Worksheet 8 (page 53) is needed for this activity. Distribute the worksheet after reading through the activity. Go through the instructions on the worksheet and then ask the pupils to complete it.



Do you talk to yourselves? Ask yourself 'Do I talk to myself?'. What was the answer? It is just as if we have a tape recorder switched on inside us and it chatters away all day telling us what we should or should not do.

Who has ever said 'I can't...'? Did you say it aloud to someone else or was it something you said to yourself in your head? It is really important to be aware of what we are saying to ourselves because these messages are being received all the time deep inside, in our unconscious, and we then act as if it were true.

If you tell yourself that you are fat, ugly and stupid, then unconsciously you will be working away at being just that. Your unconscious is rather like a computer. It believes what you tell it, so that if you say 'I can't...' then it records that as weakness and only provides you with the energy and resources for a weak person. So, if you have a voice inside talking away and you can get it to say nice things to you all the time, you will find that you will feel good about yourself. This will help you take on the things you want to do and have more success and happiness. That is the difference between negative and positive thoughts. Negative thoughts are the unhelpful ones you do not want; go for the positive ones every time if you can. These are the ones which give you inner strength and build your self-esteem.