



SELF – ESTEEM

Reintegreat School Toolkit

Self-Esteem

Understanding Self-Esteem

Self-esteem refers to how children value themselves, their sense of worth, and their belief in their own abilities.

Children with **low self-esteem** may:

- Struggle with confidence and decision-making.
- Show frustration, anger, sadness, or anxiety.
- Withdraw socially, finding friendships difficult to make or sustain.
- Be more vulnerable to teasing, bullying, and peer pressure.
- Show avoidance behaviours or use “self-defeating” strategies such as quitting, avoidance, or silliness.
- Struggle to advocate for themselves and become hard to reach.

Key point: The single most important factor in developing a child’s self-esteem is the **trusted relationship** they have with an adult. This safe and positive connection is the foundation for all other strategies.

Common Negative Thought Patterns

Children with low self-esteem often use negative self-talk, such as:

- “I’m not good enough.”
- “I’m stupid.”
- “I’m worthless.”
- “My work is rubbish.”

Adults can reframe these with balanced, supportive responses that acknowledge challenges while highlighting strengths.

Examples:

- “I’m not good enough.” → *“I can see you found your model tricky, but your structure is really strong. Let’s work on the painting together.”*
- “I’m stupid.” → *“This maths is new for you, so it’s tricky at first. You’ve got the first part right though – that’s a great start.”*

- “I’m worthless.” → *“I really enjoy hearing your opinions in discussions – they add so much.”*
- “My work is rubbish.” → *“You got frustrated with that paragraph, but I can see some excellent ideas here. Let’s work on the sentences together.”*

Strategies to Build Self-Esteem

1. Encourage Positive Thinking

- Help children identify their strengths and celebrate them.
- Use daily positive affirmations.
- Create opportunities for success, however small, and highlight them.

2. Develop Resilience

- Normalise setbacks as part of learning (“Mistakes help us grow”).
- Encourage healthy risks (e.g. trying a new sport, speaking in assembly).
- Use the “try, try again” approach with reassurance and support.

3. Foster Independence

- Allow children to make choices throughout the day.
- Encourage pursuit of personal interests and hobbies.
- Involve them in setting **realistic, achievable goals** and celebrate progress.

4. Provide Genuine Praise and Feedback

- Focus on effort, progress, and persistence, not comparisons.
- Avoid over-praise (children sense when it’s not authentic).
- Never use consequences for failed attempts – highlight positives instead.

5. Create Opportunities to Shine

- Display work and celebrate achievements.
- Provide chances to share with peers or key adults.
- Highlight and encourage unique talents and qualities.

6. Strengthen Relationships & Belonging

- Prioritise positive adult-child relationships built on trust.
- Use peer role models to encourage confidence.
- Reassure children that everyone has unique strengths and abilities.

7. Support Mental Health

- Monitor for signs of anxiety and depression.
- Introduce daily emotional “check-ins” (verbal, visual, or written).
- Use visual reminders (e.g. affirmation wristbands or positivity posters).
- Encourage self-advocacy skills to help children express needs effectively.

Classroom Practices

- Incorporate regular reflection time for children to identify positives about themselves.
- Use “growth mindset” language and model self-compassion.
- Provide visual aids such as positive affirmation wristbands or classroom displays of achievements.
- Build a culture of kindness and acceptance where differences are valued.
- Plan structured peer support opportunities (e.g. buddy systems).

Key Takeaway

Self-esteem is not built overnight. It develops gradually through **consistent encouragement, trusted relationships, opportunities for success, and resilience-building experiences.**

A child who feels valued, capable, and celebrated will begin to internalise these positive beliefs and apply them to future challenge

