

## Southern University Land- Grant Campus Self-Esteem & Socialization Fact Sheet



### Self- Esteem

#### What is self-esteem?

Self-esteem is how we feel about ourselves. It's at the heart of our personality. When we feel good about ourselves (high self-esteem), we are more capable of treating others the same way (good). When we feel bad about ourselves (low self-esteem), we are also more capable of treating others the same way (badly).

#### How is self-esteem developed?

Self-esteem is developed from the important people in our lives. Children start out by seeing their parents and other important adults in their lives as all- powerful and all-knowing. If these adults mostly spoke to us warmly, if they handled us gently, if they thought we were wonderful and told us so, we grew up with a good sense of self-esteem. If those powerful people, who knew everything, thought we were just fine, we grew up to think so too. We looked in the mirror that they held up to us, and we looked pretty good. We felt worthwhile and important. So, self-esteem starts to develop from the time you are born and continues through adulthood.

But if those people spoke to us harshly and handled us roughly and told us we were bad or stupid or a nuisance, we probably grew up with low self-esteem. If these important people thought so little of us, we tended not to think much of ourselves either. When we looked in the mirror they held up to us, we saw ourselves as not very valuable and we didn't have a good opinion of ourselves. Most people who had low self-esteem as children carry those feelings into their adult lives.

#### How does self-esteem affect behaviors and relationships?

The way we feel about ourselves shows in our actions and in the way that we allow others to treat us. If we have high self-esteem; we feel good about ourselves most of the time. This does not mean that we think that we are perfect, but it does mean that we accept ourselves- the good and the not so good. So, we can present a positive picture of ourselves to the people we know and to the people we meet out in the world.

If we have low self-esteem; it means that we focus on the negative things we do and experience. When people don't believe that anyone values them, they will often live down to low expectations- their own and those of other people. When people have low self-esteem they tend to present only the negative side of themselves to the people they know and meet.

#### How can self-esteem be strengthened?

Self-esteem can be strengthened by realizing that a healthy self-esteem does not mean that we are good at everything or that we are perfect all the time. But, it means that we are realistic about what we can do because we set reachable goals for ourselves. Whenever we reach a set goal; our self-esteem is automatically raised to a higher level. Also, when we learn to recognize success in our lives; this too will strengthen our self-esteem. Successes can be small things like helping a neighbor to carry groceries inside, reading to your children or other children, listening to someone who needs a listening ear or helping to serve a meal to people in need. Remember, wherever you do something that makes you feel good about you; that is success! Then, you are headed in the right direction to achieve a healthy SELF-ESTEEM.