

# Opening to *Self-esteem*

Self-esteem is a healthy connection with self.

It is accepting and loving ourselves exactly as we are without needing to be any other way.

We live in a world of materialism where we are constantly shown images of how we should be, act and look. The world of fashion dictates what we wear and the media dictate how we should be on so many levels. It is confusing enough for us as adults, but for children it is a minefield that they are exposed to on a daily basis.

When Joelle was four years old she saw an ad for Make-up Barbie on TV. She previously had been asking for Princess Barbie for her birthday, but after seeing the ad she declared that Make-up Barbie was best. When I enquired as to why she had changed her mind, she emphatically replied ... "because it is on television so it must be the best!" This was the absolute truth to her—and a very scary concept for me, as I felt the full force of advertising and how it so convincingly brainwashes our children—as well as ourselves!

Children go through so many different experiences throughout their childhood, some extremely positive and some extremely negative. They can experience anxiety, bullying, exclusion, sibling rivalry, parental separation, learning and behavioural difficulties, anger, confusion and fears of all kinds. These issues shape their world and have a huge impact on the child's self-esteem. If not dealt with healthily, kids carry these issues like a huge weight on their backs, blocking them from experiencing their true potential.

There is no rule book that tells us what to do in the face of bullying, how to act if our best friend decides they don't like us anymore, if someone laughs at the picture that you thought you did so well, if mum and dad argue and you think it's your fault, if your beloved dog dies and you have to be strong and keep all the sadness inside because crying is not OK ...

These suppressed emotions leak out throughout our lives in the form of anger, fear, sadness, depression, jealousy and abandonment. Often we have no idea where these feelings come from, but they can be extremely destabilising and overwhelm our lives in many ways.

**It is very healthy for children to be allowed to feel, express and release emotional pain if that is what is showing up in their life.**

As parents, we can have a major impact on our children's ability to express their emotions. Support your kids in being true to what is really going on for them, rather than suppressing their feelings out of fear or embarrassment. Often I hear parents saying 'there there' when something happens and the child is upset. This may be an appropriate response some of the time. However there are times when 'there there' may inhibit the child from really expressing what they need to. It is very healthy for children to be allowed to feel, express and release emotional pain if that is what is showing up in their life.

If a beloved pet dies, allow the child to grieve before racing out and buying a new one. Share in a farewell ritual for the pet, and allow loving tears and possibly tears of devastation to be shed. My beloved horse died when I was a teenager. It was the tragedy of my young life. A caring friend sat with me all day in my favourite patch of bush allowing me to cry and scream out the injustice of it all. I emptied out so much pain that day, and I now believe it was a vitally healthy response to an extremely sad situation.

If children can learn to express emotions healthily, then healthy self-esteem will develop naturally. This doesn't mean wallowing in self-pity or unhealthy expression of anger. If anger, for example, is out of control, look at what is the driving force projecting the anger onto another person or back at oneself. There is often something deeper that is lurking underneath, such as fear, guilt or despair. Unfortunately, very few children are equipped to deal with such painful emotions and it is often easier to erupt into anger than to meet the real pain that is the underlying cause.

Many of the subconscious messages that children receive are from parents.

I find in my private practice that when parents are truly willing to look at themselves and acknowledge and release some of the unexpressed, subconscious patterns that may be driving them, it also seems to free their children from this same pattern.

How often as a parent have you heard your mothers or fathers voice coming out of your mouth, saying something to your child that you swore to yourself you would never say? How many times have you done things or acted in a certain way with your kids, despite yourself?

# Self-esteem

Freeing ourselves from these hidden yet powerful urges and behaviours has a major impact on our children. Without the baggage of past generations, they can grow into their own potential with a positive sense of self and healthy outlook for the future.

As a parent, ask yourself:

- > Do you provide a model of healthy self-esteem for your child?
- > Do you live life through the lens of suppressed pain from your past that hasn't been dealt with healthily?
- > Do you suppress emotions or wear a mask to hide what you are really feeling? Are you able to feel emotions fully as they arise and healthily express the painful feelings as well as the joyful ones?

Remember, children often reflect back to us what we are not willing to look at in our own lives. That fearful or angry child may just be a reflection of the fearful or angry child that is locked away inside of you!

Instil in your children the knowledge that they are shining diamonds, and that within them they have everything that they will ever need. Support them from the heart space to openly face the challenges as well as the joys of life, so they can soar to their highest potential.

The most powerful gift that parents can give their children is the gift of love. The inner knowledge that they are love, loved and lovable will allow them to shine as the radiant beings that they are.

