



4 Ways to Help Teens Feel Good About Themselves

As teens struggle with anxiety and perfectionism, how can we help them like who they are?

Positive self-concept seems to be the key variable in the well-being equation.

1. Be Active

Although you may have heard this before, **kids really can benefit from regular exercise** (especially when their tendency is to sit in front of a screen). Studies indicate that physical activity alone can improve self-esteem and self-concept in children and adolescents.

2. Focus on Self-Compassion (not self-esteem)

Because self-esteem is a global evaluation of your overall worth, it has its dangers. *What am I achieving? Am I good enough? How do I compare with my peers?*

Self-compassion—treating yourself with kindness, openness, and acceptance—is a healthy alternative to the incessant striving and performance orientation often tied up with self-esteem.

Teens with higher self-compassion demonstrate greater well-being. They were okay with their flaws, acknowledging that they struggle just like those around them (*"Everybody makes mistakes; you are not alone"*), and treat themselves with the same kindness they would extend to a friend (*"It's okay; you did your best"*).

3. Capitalize on Specific Skills

If you keep your eye out for teens' talents and interests, you can support them in cultivating their strengths. Your son may think he is a terrible athlete, but he lights up when he works on school science projects. Self-concept is domain-specific. Our overall self-esteem or sense of worth tends to be rooted in eight distinct areas: athletic competence, scholastic competence, behavioral conduct, social acceptance, close friendship, romantic appeal, job satisfaction, and physical attractiveness.

Talk to the teens in your life. What are their personal values and priorities? It may not be easy to shift teens' global sense of self-worth, but we can certainly **highlight and encourage areas of interest and particular skillsets so that they feel more confident, capable, and inspired.**

4. Help Others (especially strangers)

Finally, when teens reach out to others, they are more likely to feel better about themselves. Adolescents who are kind and helpful in general have higher self-esteem, but those who direct their generosity toward strangers (not friends and family) tend to grow in self-esteem.

When teens regularly contribute to a larger cause, they learn to think beyond themselves, which may ultimately help them to be more positive, empowered, and purposeful.



As many teens struggle with anxiety and perfectionism, our urge may be to jump in and fix their problems, whatever we perceive them to be.

But a better approach, may be to cheer them on as they develop the mental habits and strengths that will support them throughout their lives.



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