



## Lesson 2: Self-Esteem

### Lesson Introduction

Self-esteem can be defined as our sense of self-worth and how good we feel about ourselves (Rosenberg, 1965). A youth's right to safety and well-being includes living in an environment that supports this strong sense of self-worth. A healthy sense of self with high self-esteem and self-compassion has been found to be an indicator of well-being and stable mental health (Leary et al., 2007; Vettese, et al., 2011). Evidence also shows that self-esteem can work as a protective factor for youth. A strong and positive sense of self-esteem can help youth cope with stress, seek out healthier relationships, maintain boundaries, and seek support in the face of unhealthy relationships.

The individuals who are a part of a youth's life can have a tremendous impact on their self-esteem. The ideas, practices, and systems in the society in which they live can also deeply impact their self-esteem. A youth's well-being and self-esteem is damaged when their gender, race, ability, sexual orientation, language, religion, and culture are not respected and when they encounter discrimination, intolerance, and prejudice. At the individual level, Children's Aid Societies are legally mandated to protect children from abuse, including emotional abuse, from caregivers in the home and in the community. At the institutional level, the [Ontario Human Rights Commission](#) investigates discrimination complaints that relate to services, workplaces, housing, and facilities.

The focus of this module is to raise awareness among youth about the importance of positive self-esteem and how strong self-esteem can help to protect them from maltreatment. In this module, youth will learn how people, ideas, and systems can negatively impact their sense of self and self-esteem, the importance of positive self-talk in developing and maintaining self-esteem, and strategies for boosting self-esteem.

### Key Themes

1. Self-esteem is a feeling of self-worth. It is an indication of how much you like and value yourself.
2. Liking, accepting, and having compassion for yourself can boost your self-esteem.
3. If you are proud of yourself and the things you do, your self-esteem is likely to be high.
4. The people you have relationships with can impact your self-esteem.

5. The ideas, practices, and systems in your society can also impact your self-esteem. If your society doesn't respect your gender, race, ability, sexual orientation, language, religion, or culture, there will be a negative impact on your self-esteem.
6. Self-esteem can protect us. When we have high self-esteem, we are less likely to believe negative or hurtful messages from others.
7. Helping others makes us feel good about ourselves and can increase our self-esteem.

### Learning Outcomes

1. Increase awareness about how ideas, practices, and systems in a society, as well as the way individuals behave, can impact self-esteem. Increase awareness of how a strong sense of self and high self-esteem can help protect youth from maltreatment.

### Learning Objectives

1. Identify the importance of a healthy self and how others can impact our self-esteem.
2. Identify how ideas, practices, and systems can impact our self-esteem.
3. Increase awareness about positive self-talk and its benefits.
4. Identify strategies for boosting self-esteem.
5. Increase awareness of how a strong sense of self protects you.

### Introduction Discussion Questions

1. What is self-esteem?
  - *Internal thoughts and feelings that guide how you think and value yourself*
  - *It is a sense of your self-worth*
  - *Self-esteem is about trying your best and feeling proud of yourself; it is about feeling good about the things that make you unique or special*
  - *How you feel about yourself can change; it is fluid*
2. Why is self-esteem important?
  - *Helps you become aware of yourself, your feelings, your intuitions*
  - *Helps you to make better choices (e.g., setting healthy boundaries, etc.)*
  - *Helps you cope if you encounter racism, prejudice, and intolerance*
  - *Helps you enjoy relationships and life*
3. How does the language you use to talk to yourself affect you?
  - **Negative self-talk:** *can increase your self-doubt, lead you to feel unworthy or unimportant, and can begin a toxic cycle of not believing in yourself*
  - **Positive self-talk:** *can increase your self-confidence, lead you to believe what you have to say is important and valued, help you make healthy choices*

4. How does it make you feel when other people use derogatory language about you?
  - *It is hurtful and makes you feel bad about yourself*
  - *Can lead to low self-esteem and self-doubt if messages are internalized*
  - *Recognizing how these negative messages make us feel can help us make better choices around setting boundaries with individuals who say these things about us*
  
5. How can ideas, practices, and systems in a society be harmful to your self-esteem?
  - *If society doesn't value your gender, race, ability, sexual orientation, language, culture, or religion, it can make you feel bad about yourself*
  - *Systems can be unaware and/or disrespectful of your unique needs, including identity, ability, racial and cultural needs, and you can internalize these messages*
  - *Systems can intentionally try to harm you, for example residential schools and their treatment of Indigenous children and youth*
  
6. How can self-esteem be protective?
  - *It can prevent you from being influenced by negative messages (both from others and from yourself)*
  - *It can help you become more in tune with your intuition and feelings to make better and healthier choices*
  
7. What are some ways you can boost your self-esteem?
  - *Engage in positive self-talk*
  - *Set boundaries in situations and with people that do not make you feel good about yourself*
  - *Be in healthy relationships*
  - *Make good choices*
  - *Help others because they feel good knowing you care and you feel good for helping*
  - *Do things you enjoy and engage in self-care*
  
8. What can you do if you cannot boost your self-esteem?
  - *Turn to your support networks – friends, family, teachers, family friends, etc.*
  - *Do things that make you feel good about yourself and/or lift your mood*
  - *If you are struggling with a problem or worry, get help from a trusted adult and/or a resource like Kids Help Phone, Naseeha Youth Helpline, Black Youth Helpline, and LGBT Youthline, and Children's Aid Societies*

### Activity

- [Link to Activity 1: What's on Your Mind?](#)
- [Link to Activity 2: Self-esteem Bookmark](#)

## Relevant Ontario Curriculum Expectations

### Grade 7:

Health and Physical Education:

Strand A Social-Emotional Learning Skills

- A1.2, A1.3, A1.4, A1.5

Strand D Healthy Living Specific Expectations

- D1.1, D2.3, D2.4, D3.3

### Grade 8:

Health and Physical Education:

Strand A Social-Emotional Learning Skills

- A1.2, A1.3, A1.4, A1.5

Strand D Healthy Living Specific Expectations

- D1.4, D1.5, D2.4, D3.2

### Grade 9:

Health and Physical Education:

Healthy Living Strand:

- C1.1, C3.2

### Grade 10:

Health and Physical Education:

Healthy Living Strand:

- C1.1, C2.1, C2.3, C2.4

### Grade 11:

Health and Physical Education:

Active Living Strand

- A1.2

Healthy Living Strand:

- C1.3, C1.4, C3.3, C3.4

### Grade 12:

Health and Physical Education:

Healthy Living Strand

- C2.2, C2.3, C2.4, C2.5

## References

1. Leary, M.R., Tate, E.B., Adams, C.E., Batts Allen, A., & Hancock, J. (2007). Self-compassion and reactions and unpleasant self-relevant events: The implications of treating oneself kindly. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 92*, 887-904.
2. Rosenberg, M. (1965). *Society and the adolescent self-image*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
3. Vettese, L.C., Dyer, C.E., Li, W.L., & Wekerle, C. (2011). Does self-compassion mitigate the association between childhood maltreatment and later emotion regulation difficulties? A preliminary investigation. *International Journal of Mental Health Addiction, 9*, 480-491.