

I'm More than Just Who You Think I am...I'm Me!

by Paula Mott-Becker

Objectives

- To recognize how we receive our self-esteem.
- To identify and cope with things which break down our self-esteem.
- To learn how to build and strengthen our self-esteem.

Self-esteem is shaped through many experiences, and many different people have an impact on how we view ourselves. However, the most important ingredient in healthy self-esteem is the ability to believe in ourselves as vital and important creations of God, in spite of and because of what goes on around us. In order to attain or maintain a positive self-image, we must find ways to draw from the good that is graciously placed in our path and understand the bad in order to learn from it.

Preparation

- Recruit and rehearse participants for the "opening" dialog.
- Make message slips for "Self-Esteem—Cafeteria Style."
- Duplicate the responsive reading for the closing.

Opening

The opening dialog contrasts what many young people believe about themselves and who they really are as baptized, forgiven, creative, and energetic children of God. The rest of the evening will attempt to bring these two beliefs closer.

The reading should be practiced before the youth night begins. It should be read by a youth and an adult. You may wish to use the chancel of your church or another common worship area for this section. The adult should be standing off to one side with the youth sitting in the center, on the floor, legs crossed and head down.

Opening Dialog

Adult: You are baptized and chosen by God. You are special.

Youth: (sarcastically) Right!

Adult: God created you and He loves you. You are one of a kind. You are special.

Youth: Sure, you can tell me that, but I don't feel very special.

Adult: When you were baptized God brought you into His family. He wants you as His very own child.

Youth: Well, that's more than my own family wants.

Adult: You don't seem to understand...

Youth: No, you don't understand. I've heard all those words before and that's all they are to me, just words with no meaning.

Adult: I guess words aren't always enough. (Moves closer and sits down next to youth.)

Youth: That's what I mean. I keep coming to church and hearing all these things about being special and wonderful, but the way I see it, if it's true, God is the only one who thinks so.

Adult: Maybe that's enough.

Youth: Maybe it should be but it's hard to feel very good about yourself when people laugh at you or make fun of what you say or how you look.

Adult: But not everybody does that.

Youth: (frustrated) You just can't understand.

Adult: I'm trying to understand. I've felt that way, too. You never grow out of being hurt by people.

Youth: But you have choices and people respect you. All I get at home is a lot of "you should do this" and "don't be like that." At school if you don't get all A's and B's you feel stupid. You find out that friends are only friends as long as you do what they want you to. So you tell me what difference it makes whether or not God thinks I'm special. It doesn't change anything, so why worry about it?

Adult: That's a good question (youth's name). Maybe together we can find some answers.

After the drama, briefly discuss the following:

1. Describe someone with a good, healthy self-image. What is such a person like? (confident, willing to risk, caring, sensitive, etc.)
2. What's the difference between feeling good about yourself and being conceited? (Being conceited or self-centered is a way of hiding negative feelings. Someone who truly has a good self-image believes himself/herself to be of value and worth.)
3. Why is a positive self-image so important for people to develop? (A healthy self-esteem allows you to find the best in yourself and in others. It is necessary for being a truly effective, caring individual.)
4. How do we develop our self-esteem? (Our self-esteem is developed through the experiences of life. However, we decide whether to view those experiences as positive or negative.)
5. How can God's love for us make a difference in our self-esteem?

Self-Esteem—Cafeteria Style

Before the evening begins, type the following list of sentences and make enough copies for the entire group. Cut the lists apart and place each statement in a different bowl, basket, or pile around the room. (If you have 10 participants, each bowl should contain 10 of the same sentence.)

Message List:

You have a big mouth.

It's your problem so fix it yourself.

I wish you would think before you talk.

I like being with you.

Don't always brag.

I forgive you.

I'm glad you're my son/daughter.

Will you forgive me?

Can I have a hug?

You can do better.

You're only nice when you want something.

Why don't you grow up?

You can do it.

Be good.

You're always so messy.

Don't cry.

You must try harder.

Don't make mistakes.

You take up too much of my time.

You're doing a good job.

I hate cleaning up after you.

I'm glad you're here.

You're just like your father/mother.

What will our friends think?
Just go away and leave me alone.
You're going to end up in jail.
Why can't you be more like your brother/sister?
I like to hold you.
Can't you do anything right?
I love you.
Be successful.
She/He is our little naughty one.
You make our whole family look bad.
You can decide for yourself.
It's good to try new things.
I'm glad you talk to us.
I don't care what you think.
You look nice.
Don't ask, just do what I say.
Don't show your feelings.
I trust you.
You drive me crazy.
It's always your fault when things go bad.
I hate you.

Ask participants to walk around the room and read the various messages. Instruct them to pick up and keep any of the messages that they remember hearing. Allow time for the entire group to see all of the messages. You may encourage those who finish early to compare and talk about their messages with others.

After everyone has chosen their messages, gather them in a group. Post two pieces of newsprint with headings: BUILDERS and BREAKERS. Ask the participants to randomly share some messages they have selected. As a group, decide if the message is a self-esteem builder or breaker. Write the statement in the appropriate column. If the statement is negative, try to find something positive about it. If none can be found, rewrite the statement so it is positive or ask all who have that particular message to tear it up and throw it away.

Continue this process in the large group for as long as time permits or until all statements have been discussed.

Wrap Up

All of us experience negative communication in our life. We cannot always control what is said or done to us, but we can control to some degree how we are going to deal with it. Each of us make a choice about how other people and situations will affect our lives. The choice is usually made in our minds without our even being aware of it. However, if we become more sensitive to the power we have to change our outlooks, we can begin to turn our negative patterns into positive ones.

Bible Study

Read the story of Zacchaeus from Luke 19:1-9.

Discuss:

- What kind of self-image do you think Zacchaeus had? Why?
- What did Jesus do that might have helped to build Zacchaeus's self-esteem?
- Put together a short dialog of what might have been said between Jesus and Zacchaeus.
- Divide into pairs and ask each pair to come up with an alternative dialog that might have happened if Zacchaeus had taken everything Jesus said as negative.

Example: Jesus: Hey, Zach, come down here, I'd like to talk to you.

Zach: No way, Jesus, you're no different than anyone else; you'll just make fun of me.

Ask a few of the participants to share their dialogs and discuss how the outcome might have been if Zacchaeus had a self-image that would not allow anything positive into his life.

Ask participants to think of a time when they reacted negatively to someone or something. Have a few share their experiences and discuss ways that it might have turned out more positively.

Have you ever had a time when you felt like Zacchaeus after Jesus affirmed him? What did someone do or say to you? We call those compliments and words of praise "affirmations." Jesus shared affirmations with those around Him.

He shares with us today. He keeps saying I love you, I love you. In our Baptism He affirmed that each of us is His special child. The affirmation and strength we draw from God's acceptance of us in Christ is a start toward self-esteem.

Recreation

Play a challenging, competitive game that your facilities and time will allow (volleyball, basketball, broomball, four square, etc.)

Ask someone to observe the game and jot down any positive or negative comments that are exchanged. After the game, use these comments to discuss:

- How did you feel when you heard the comments?
- How many were positive comments as compared to negative comments?
- How can we become better self-esteem builders?
- How can building others' self-esteem affect our own self-esteem?

Closing

The closing is a responsive reading to be done by the entire group with one leader. You will need to make copies of it before the evening begins.

Leader: Lord, we have learned some things tonight about ourselves and about You, too.

Group: We found that we have choices to make about who we will be.

Leader: But it's not all that easy, Lord. We need help to feel good about ourselves.

Group: We know this is where You come in God, but we're not exactly sure how You fit in to all of this.

Leader: We do know that You build us up with Your acceptance and love.

Group: You give us each other and times together like this one tonight.

Leader: You give us Your Word, Baptism, and the Holy Supper.

Group: You give us hope and forgiveness so we can try again.

Leader: Help us catch the joy of life that You have given.

Group: And make us people who carry the image that You gave us from the beginning...

All: "And everything that was made was good"—INCLUDING US! Amen!

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