



Remember, Not Everyone is OK

by KATHY TAYLOR-ROGERS

As teachers, you have all recognized children in your classrooms that have suffered from low self-esteem. Often, they are the same children that get bullied, the last ones to get picked to play on a team, or the last one chosen as a partner for a class project. I will never forget when my youngest son came home one day and told me about a vote they had in their class that day for class president. I asked him who he voted for, and he told me the child's name. I asked him why he voted for this particular child, and he told me it was because he knew that no one else would, so he wanted him to at least get one vote. Of course, as a mother I could not have been prouder that he recognized how damaging it would be if this child did not get any votes. This insight at such a young age was impressive to me.

“...let us try harder not to judge others and to Be Kind because we never really know what journey someone else is on within their life.”

Children who suffer from low self-esteem often lack confidence, find it hard to make friends, feel lonely and isolated, avoid new things, find change hard, don't deal well with failure, tend to put themselves down and may make self-defeating comments like “I am stupid”, and are never proud of what they achieve because they always think they could have done better and constantly compare themselves to others in a negative way. When we recognize those students, we try our best to encourage and support these children so that we can help to improve their self-esteem. I am sure that most of you can recall a student you have nurtured because you knew that they lacked self-confidence and showed signs of low self-esteem.

Self-esteem is defined as how a person feels about themselves. It is a person's subjective sense of personal worth or value. Some of the factors that define your self-esteem are:

- Self-confidence
- Feeling of security
- Identity
- Sense of belonging
- Feeling of competence

Having a healthy self-esteem can influence your motivation, your mental well-being, and your overall quality of life.

We have a tendency to forget that children are not the only ones who suffer from low self-esteem. After working in the area of Mental Health for over 20 years, I can assure you that many more adults suffer from low self-esteem than you may realize. I have known adults who have suffered from low self-esteem since they were children. For these individuals, the negative patterns of putting themselves down, never appreciating their accomplishments, constantly comparing themselves to others in a negative way, constant cycle of “negative self-talk” and overall lack of self-confidence continues to be a big part of who they are in their adult lives. We do not always recognize this; hence, we may make comments or judgements that could be very harmful to these people. Even a comment like “duhh” after they make a statement can be devastating. Often, these adults spend a great deal of energy trying to put on a “good front” trying to look confident, even though they may not internally feel confident.

I have also known adults who describe themselves as having high self-esteem for most of their lives but this changes for them as a result of events that have occurred in their life. In one case, it was a person who was in a series of failed relationships over a period of time where their partners had cheated on them. Two of those ex-partners had been emotionally abusive and were constantly insulting and belittling the person throughout their time together. Over time, this person began to internalize the reason for the relationship break ups as being a result of them not being “good enough”. Their sense of self plummeted to the point where there was a constant cycle of negative “self-talk”. This severely damaged their self-esteem, and their mental well-being began to suffer as a result. It made it hard for the person to consider new relationships as a result of being convinced they

would not be good enough for anyone. The person finally started to recognize how low their self-esteem had gotten and decided they no longer wanted to allow this negative cycle of thinking to define them. The person sought counselling.

We never know what anyone is dealing with in their lives. As I mentioned, many people put a great deal of energy into trying to hide their mental health challenges. It is for this reason that we need to be kind to each other at all times. We need to be mindful of what we say, and we should not encourage anyone to talk negatively about themselves. I am sure we have all heard the saying, “If you don’t have anything good to say, then don’t say anything at all”. I wish this was the rule of thumb people used in their lives, whether in conversation with others or on social media. We need to start to share positive things that we sincerely admire in others with the person. We often notice strengths and admirable qualities in those around us, but we often don’t tell them about these positive observations. Sharing with people what we notice and admire about them in a positive way is extremely powerful. Keep in mind that someone who suffers from low self-esteem might minimize the compliments, but they will appreciate them nonetheless as long as they are genuine. As we go throughout a new year, let us try harder not to judge others and to Be Kind because we never really know what journey someone else is on within their life.

If you are someone who suffers from low self-esteem, then I would really encourage you to seek help. It is very hard to break this cycle of “self-talk” and negative thinking on your own. With the help of a good counsellor, you can re-train your brain and learn how to recognize your strengths and improve your self-esteem. It is never too late to change the way you think, and you owe it to yourself to live your best life. With the right help and support, you can drastically improve your life and in turn, your mental health. You are worth it.

(Reference: Verywellmind – Kendra Cherry 2021)

Kathy Taylor-Rogers is a Coordinator with the Employee Assistance Program for Teachers. She is replacing Gail Carroll who is currently on leave. For confidential assistance contact Kenda Riggs (ext. 265) or Kathy Taylor-Rogers (ext. 242).

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