

A common problem I have noticed more and more in middle schools and high schools is low self-esteem in children and young people. Some of the negative effects low self-esteem can have on a child later on in life are greater susceptibility to bullying, not striving to do the best they can achieve in school and ending their education after they graduate high school.

To address this growing problem I developed a program, which I call “What Makes ME GREAT”. The goal of this program is to help children understand what it means to have good self-esteem and discover some of the good qualities they possess that they may have been unaware of prior to the program. The grade levels I worked with were 1st through 5th graders. Surprisingly, only three children in a class of 12 second graders knew what self-esteem was and only five children in a group of 13 kids in fourth and fifth grade. I feel that children’s lack of understanding about self-esteem could be one of the reasons some children lack a strong self-esteem.

On my first day with the children, I had them complete a questionnaire asking them “What do you think self-confidence is?”, “What do you think bullying is?” and “What do you think about yourself?” Some of the responses I received for the first question were “When you have confidence and you keep it to yourself”, “To do your best”, “When you do your best on something” and “How you feel about yourself”. Some of the responses I received for the second question were “When someone picks on someone else constantly no matter how many times the person being picked on wants them to stop”, “Being mean to other people” and “When everyone knows you’re there but they act as if you are not there”. Some of the responses I received for the third question were “Normal”, “I think I am a smart and caring girl and no one can change that about me”, and “I’m good at video games and watching TV and being bored and small, hate running and bad at jumping”. After they were done with their questionnaire I showed them an anti-bullying video and had some of them read the subtitled parts. When a student was done reading, I had another student explain in their own words what they thought it meant. Following the video, I had them gather in a circle and we played a game called Spider Webs. Holding the end of a ball of yarn, I tossed the ball to someone else in the circle. Whoever caught the ball of yarn had to say something good about their self before they tossed the yarn ball to another person. Once everyone had a piece of string I asked the students what they thought that the yarn symbolized. When everyone had given a response I explained that the yarn showed we all are connected in some way or another.

In the following days I continued to show the anti-bullying videos, but added something new. I wrote each student’s name on a slip of paper and placed them in a box. I pulled a girl’s name and a boy’s name out of a box and the rest of the class would write something good about them. An example would be if I pulled out a girl’s name, which may be Suzie and a boy’s name may be Tom. Someone might write Suzie is a good singer and another person might write Tom is good at football. When everyone finished writing their comments about that person, I collected them so that later on I could make them into small booklets for the students to keep. At the end of the program, I gave them their booklets along with a little trinket to remember what they learned in the program. As soon as they had all looked through their booklets, I had them get into a circle and share what their favorite thing was that someone wrote about them.

When everyone had shared what their favorite comment was I had them fill out another questionnaire that asked “What do you think has changed about your viewpoint of yourself?” “What new talents have you learned about yourself?” “What are your views of bullying?” Some of the responses I received for the first question was “Fast, I’m the man”. “Very nice, smart, kind and good at art”, “I’m good at kicking” and “Made me feel more special”. Some of the responses I received for the second question were ‘Good at helping others”, “I’m good at running”, “Art, running, and singing” and “Hula hoop”. Some of the responses I received for the third question were “Mean” and “A mean thing that no one likes and it hurts other people’s feelings”.

Some things you can do for a child with a low self-esteem is encourage them daily and be there for them when they need someone to listen. Parents can help by spending time with their children doing activities their children enjoy. For example, if your child enjoys painting then spend time painting with them and make a point of hanging their artwork prominently and encouraging them to take pride in their artwork.

By working together as parents and a community we can teach children the importance of self-esteem and improve their self-confidence.