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Enhancing Self-Esteem and Self-Identity in the Child with an Autism Spectrum Disorder



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Overview

- What is self-esteem?
- What causes low self-esteem in children on the spectrum?
- What is self-identity?
- Why do children with ASD have difficulties with self-identity?
- What can be done to enhance the self-esteem of a child with an ASD?
- What can be done to ensure a positive self-identity?
- How to share an ASD diagnosis to promote acceptance and enhance positive responses
- Two group programs designed to enhance self-esteem and self-identity
- Helpful resources for promoting self-esteem and self-identity





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What is self-esteem?

- One's overall emotional evaluation of his or her self-worth and self-value - can be positive or negative
- Appraisals of one's appearance, beliefs, emotions, behaviours
- Judgement of oneself and attitude towards the self
- Encompasses beliefs about the self and resultant emotions
- Closely related to psychological well-being
- Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: 1. Physiological, 2. Security, 3. Social, 4. Esteem, 5. Self-Actualisation
- Successful peer relationships paramount to development of healthy self-esteem for children.
- Social acceptance = confidence and high self-esteem.
Rejection & loneliness = self-doubt and low self-esteem



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Causes of low self-esteem in ASD

- Noticing differences from peers – interests, dress sense, social interactions
- Negative comparisons – comparing self to others & their difficulties with other's strengths
- Thinking globally "Everything is harder for me"
- Negative self-talk – overly self-critical – focus on their difficulties
- See themselves as needing "fixing"
- Frequent visits to GPs, specialists, therapists = "something wrong with me"
- Miss jokes & sarcasm = perception that they have a problem
- Differences = defects



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Causes of low self-esteem in ASD

- Well-meaning comments on behaviour / suggestions perceived as criticism
- Mistakes akin to failure – fear of trying
- Stand out from crowd, feel on the outer/periphery - not part of the “in crowd/group”
- Teasing and bullying – predators of playground prey on them – alone, vulnerable, weak
- Excluded - no party or play date invites, left out of games & conversations – some notice others don't



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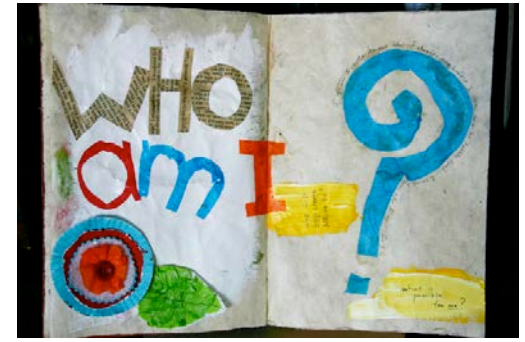


Signs of low self-esteem

- Speaking negatively about self – “I’m stupid”, “I can’t do anything right”, “I’m not even going to bother trying because I know I’ll get it wrong”, “I’m the worst in the world”
- Difficulty taking criticism or feedback
- Pessimism, negativity – low mood & withdrawal
- Reluctance to try something new for fear of getting it wrong - fear of mistake making
- Reluctant to seek help or tell people don’t understand
- Give up easily & want others to do things for them
- Perfectionism but often never satisfied because can’t achieve high expectations set themselves



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What is Self-Identity/Concept?

- Answers the question "who am I?"
- What one thinks or believes about him/herself
- Encompasses physical appearance, goals, personality characteristics, likes and dislikes, skills and abilities
- Different to self-esteem
- Self-concept – "I do well in Maths" (what we believe or think)
- Self-esteem – "I feel good about my Mathematical abilities" (how we feel about it)



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Why do children with ASD have difficulties with self-identity?

- Difficulties with describing character and personality traits well known – often form part of diagnostic assessment e.g. “what sort of a person is your Mum?” or “what sort of a person are you?”
- Difficulties with introspecting and describing thoughts and feelings
- Often extensive vocabulary yet limited vocabulary for describing personality traits
- Find people difficult to understand so understanding themselves is even harder



What is Self-Esteem?



Self-esteem is:

- o Feeling good about yourself
- o Liking yourself
- o Feeling that you are a worthwhile person
- o Believing in yourself and what you do
- o Self-esteem lets us try new things without too much fear of not getting them right – we just give them a go
- o Good self-esteem helps us to feel happy about being ourselves
- o It is important for us to feel good or okay about ourselves most of the time

Make a mark on the line to show where you think your self-esteem is now.

Low



when I'm left out at school
+ when kids don't
listen to me

when I'm with
my family

High



At school when
I'm playing gang
up with my friends

If your self-esteem is lower than where you would like it to be that's okay. There are lots of ways that we can help to increase it!



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Strategies to enhance self-esteem

- Be a good role model
- Celebrate difference & uniqueness in general – do this from a young age
- Positive affirmations – I think, I am. Encourage & reward positive self-talk
- Point out positives associated with ASD not just negatives
- Positive scrapbook celebrating achievements
 - Certificates, photos of achievements, compliments, qualities - one word to a page, special interests
 - “That doesn’t sound like the Jack I know”
- Praise and reward efforts and attempts not just successes – emphasise effort column when reviewing report card



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Strategies to enhance self-esteem?

- Expert on a topic – present to the class
- Good with computers – “go to” IT person for the class
- Strength in Maths – go back to previous year level to assist
- Warm fuzzy activity – have peers provide compliments & record in positives book
- Extra curricular activities based on child’s strengths & to provide opportunities to mix with like-minded peers. Try individual pursuits, martial arts, scouts, art classes.
- Emphasise strengths - strength based activities e.g. strength cards
- Help out with a task at home – pitched at their level that can have success at - increases confidence



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Strategies to enhance self-esteem

- Have others in extended family & friends say what like about child & record in positives book
- Work on view of mistake making – Mistakes that worked book, normalising
- Finished box or tick chart for tasks – sense of accomplishment & achievement
- Classroom – different assessment modes, typing rather than writing, assignment on their topic
- Mentor to younger students in area of strength
- Zero tolerance on bullying – teach skills here & resilience
- Special interest = great source of self-esteem



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Things I like vs find hard about being me

THINGS I LIKE...

- That I'm good at Maths
- That I have Mrs Little for a teacher and she reads me the 13 Story Tree House
- That I have a really cool fort with swings
- That I like my dogs Cindy and Ebony and I like feeding them

THINGS I FIND HARD...

- I find writing really tricky because I forget what I was going to write and I am slow
- That I find it hard to get ready for school in the mornings



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Things I am good at...

- Lego
- Remembering things
- Computers & PS4
- Sense of smell
- Tae Kwon Do
- Art
- Good pet owner
- Coming up with cool ideas
- Lifting things (strong)
- Cataloging things
- Noticing details & mistakes
- Reading maps



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Strategies to develop a positive self-identity

- Project on self who am I? – cultural heritage, appearance, likes, dislikes, goals, strengths, difficulties, personality characteristics
- Point out personality qualities you see in them e.g. “You are so creative Sebastian!” or “You are such a loyal friend to Sammy”
- Representation of self through music, art, poem, stories
- Help them to better understand and celebrate their differences and therefore their ASD
- “I’m the sort of person who....”
 - has difficulty with social chit chat
 - likes to eat my lunch in a quiet area
 - prefers typing than writing
 - likes to know things ahead of time
 - enjoys having time by myself sometimes rather than being in a group all the time



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Personality qualities activity

Fun Hard-working Kind Quiet Happy

Likeable Confident Generous Strong-willed

Sociable Careful Friendly Thoughtful Interested in others

Sensitive Sporty Trustworthy A good friend

Adventurous A good listener Honest Popular

Brave Patient Helpful Understanding

Sympathetic Polite Intelligent Cheerful Supportive

Easy-going Reliable Energetic Gentle Loyal



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Sharing the diagnosis in the clinic

- Timing is everything – questioning why different – if left too long may jump to conclusion that different = defective
- Need to jump in here to ensure an accurate perception
- 99% time goes well
- Need rapport first
- Can involve family - strengths and difficulties in family members and individual
- Pattern identified by Hans Asperger in 1940s – named after himself
- Pieces of a 100 piece jigsaw puzzle – everyone has pieces
- Brain wired differently
- Emphasising difference not defect



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Sharing the diagnosis

CARD SORT ACTIVITY

Strengths

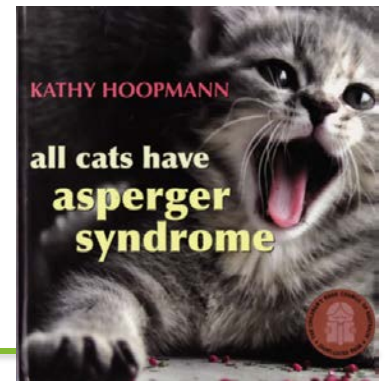
Good with computers
Honest
feeling
Speak your mind
Loyal friend
Noticing details
Memory for facts
Expert on a topic
Notice sounds others don't
Understanding how things work

Difficulties

Handwriting
Knowing what someone else is
Managing emotions
Making and keeping friends
Sporty
Fashion sense
Bullying
Organisational skills
Conversations



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Sharing the diagnosis

- Explaining why we don't share with everyone – ignorance – super power Clark Kent vs Superman
- May read All Cats Have AS, Different Like Me, It's an Asperger's Thing
- Famous people with AS in child's area of interest
- Don't make too big a deal of it – let them come to you for questions, leave some books around, bring it up generally – not specific to them e.g. positive news story, charity day at school, amazing engineering feat



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For educators

- Embrace & celebrate different abilities – attitude from educators towards child on spectrum flows on to other children. Don't tolerate teasing, put downs, criticism amongst all children.
- May use *Sixth Sense* or *My Friend Has Asperger's* or *It's an Asperger's Thing* to assist peers to better understand ASD or project on famous individuals throughout history with AS & their contributions
- Speak generally about everyone having strengths and challenges
- Find opportunities to promote the child's strengths and abilities e.g. "Did everyone hear the fantastic poem Fred wrote about owls?"



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Group programs to enhance self-esteem & self-identity

- 7-9 year old girls group program
- Teenage girls group program
- Both focus on self-concept & self-esteem, as well as embracing and celebrating difference
- Activities such as:
 - Write an advertisement about themselves describing physical characteristics, personality traits, strengths and difficulties, likes and dislikes and goals.
 - Emphasising differences and celebrating these e.g. different interests, different families, different modes of schooling – all okay!
 - Looking at difference between ideal versus actual self and dangers of there being too much disparity between the two



The Same versus Different



In some ways we are the same as other kids
and in some ways we are different.

Write down the name of someone in the group
who likes something the same as you.

What do they like that is the same?

Write down the name of someone in the group
who likes something different to you.

What do they like that is different?





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Knowing when to seek help

- May like to work on some of these ideas yourself – add to great work already doing
- May need to engage with a psychologist to provide further help (concerned re low mood, anxiety, bullying etc) – someone outside of family helpful, own time devoted to them
- Seek out specialist in ASD rather than generalist psychologist where possible – slight differences in approach with ASD children
- Psychologists can also help with social skills & emotion management difficulties, dealing with bullying, organisational skills difficulties, enhancing perspective taking abilities etc
- 10 individual and 10 group Medicare rebated sessions per year

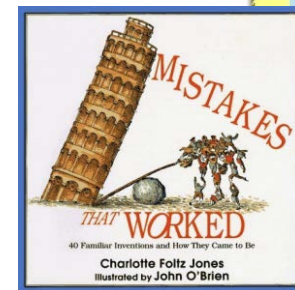
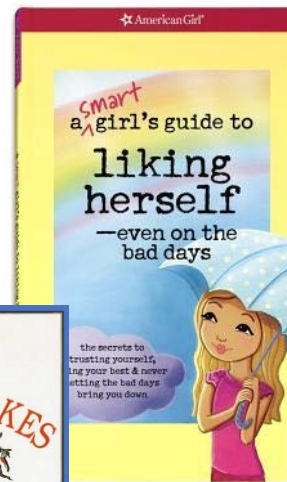


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Helpful resources

- A smart girl's guide to liking herself – even on the bad days by Laurie Zelinger
- Different like me: My book of autism heroes by Jennifer Elder
- All cats have Asperger's by Kathy Hoopmann
- My friend has Asperger's by Amanda Curtis
- The sixth sense by Carol Gray
- My happy book by Kikki K
- Understanding Sam and Asperger's Syndrome by Clarabelle van Niekerk
- I think, I am by Louise Hay
- Strength cards for kids
- The things I love about me by Trace Maroney
- Mistakes that worked by Charlotte Foltz Jones





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Question time...

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