



# Coaching 101 - Self-Esteem

## **What is Self-Esteem:**

Self-esteem is the way a person sees themselves. Self-esteem can be affected by comments, positive or negative, from others including messages about participation in sport. Most individuals' thoughts and feelings about themselves fluctuate based on their daily experiences. Healthy self-esteem is based on our ability to assess ourselves accurately and still be accepting of who we are. We must acknowledge our strengths and weaknesses and at the same time recognize that we are worthy and worthwhile. Our self-esteem evolves throughout our lives and we need to develop an image of ourselves through our experiences with different people and activities. When growing up, our successes, failures, and how we are treated by our families, teachers, coaches and peers, combine to create our self-esteem. Our past experiences, even the things we don't usually think about, continue to impact our daily life in the form of an inner voice. Although we do not hear this in the same way we would a spoken one. For people with a healthy self-esteem, the message is usually reassuring. For people with low self-esteem, the inner voice becomes harsh and critical, punishing one's mistakes and belittling one's accomplishments.

## **3 Faces of Low Self-esteem**

### ***The Imposter:***

They act happy and successful, but are really terrified of failure.

### ***The Rebel:***

They act like the opinions of others, especially people who are important or powerful, don't matter. They live with constant anger about feeling good enough.

### ***The Victim:***

They act helpless and are unable to cope with the world and wait for someone to come to the rescue.

## **Consequences of Low Self-Esteem**

- Create anxiety, stress, loneliness and increased likelihood of depression.
- Cause problems with friendship and romantic relationships.
- Seriously impair academic and job performance.
- Lead to increased vulnerability to drug or alcohol abuse.

### **3 Steps to improve Self-Esteem**

Change doesn't necessarily happen quickly or easily, but it can help. You are not powerless, once you have accepted or are at least willingly to entertain that you can change.

#### ***Step 1 Rebut the critic***

The first important step in improving self-esteem is to begin to challenge the negative messages of the inner voice. Here are some of the typical examples of the inner critic and some strategies to rebut that critical voice:

- Unfair harsh inner critic: People said they liked my presentation, but it was nowhere near as good as it should have been. I can't believe no one noticed all the places I messed up. I am such an imposter. Acknowledge strengths - "Wow they really liked it. Maybe it was not perfect but, I worked hard on that presentation and did a good job. I am proud of myself.
- An inner voice that generalizes unrealistically: I got an "F" on that test. I don't understand anything in this class. I'm such an idiot. Who am I fooling? I should not be taking this class. I am stupid and don't belong in college. Be specific - I did poorly on this test, but I have done okay on the homework. There are some things I don't understand as well as I thought I did, but now I have a better idea of how to prepare and what I need to work on. I have done fine in other tough classes
- An inner critic that make illogical leaps: He is frowning. He doesn't say anything but, I know it means he does not like me. Challenge logic - He is frowning but I don't know why. It could have nothing to do with me. Maybe I should ask.
- An inner voice that catastrophizes: She turned me down for a date! I am so embarrassed and humiliated. No one likes or cares about me. I will never get a girlfriend. I will always be alone. Be objective: - Ouch that hurt. Okay, she does not want to go out with me. That does not mean no one does. I know I am a nice person. I am confident that, in time, I'll find someone who is as interested in me as I am in her.

#### ***Step 2 Practice Self – Compassion***

Rebutting your critical inner voice is an important first step, but it is not enough. Practising self-compassion means treating yourself with the same empathy you would show others. If a friend were having a hard time, you would likely to be extra caring and supportive. You deserve the same treatment. Rather than focusing on evaluating yourself, you can acknowledge when things are difficult and try to nurture and care for yourself in these times especially. For example:

- Forgive yourself when you don't do all you'd hoped: Try to be gentle with yourself rather than critical of yourself when things don't go as you had hoped. This can be surprisingly hard if you are not doing it, but recognizing that such experiences are inevitable can help.
- Recognize your humanness. As humans, we all make mistakes and we are all impacted by external factors that we can't control. Accepting our "humanness" helps us feel more connected to others rather than feeling we are enduring these types of experiences alone. Recognizing that mistakes are an inevitable part of being human helps us to be more compassionate with ourselves and others.
- Be mindful of your emotions: If you feel upset about a situation, try to allow yourself to experience that emotion in a balanced way, without suppressing it or getting completely swept up in the feeling. When practising mindfulness, try not to judge yourself for having a negative emotion. If you can remember that emotions come and go and eventually pass, it will help you to not become overwhelmed by your feelings.

### ***Step 3 Get help from others:***

Getting help from others is often the most important step a person can take to improve to improve their self-esteem, but it can also be the most difficult. People with low self-esteem often don't ask for help because they feel they don't deserve it, but other people can help to challenge the critical messages that come from negative past experiences. Here are some ways to teach others:

- Ask for support from friends: Ask friends to tell you what they like about you or things they think you do well. Ask someone who cares about you just to listen to you vent for a little while without trying to fix things. Ask for a hug. Ask someone who loves you to remind you that they do.
- Get help from teachers, mentors or other helpers: Go to teachers, advisers or mentors to ask for help. Remember they are there to help you. If you lack self-confidence in certain areas, take classes or try out new activities to increase your sense of competence.

### **The importance of Self-esteem in Sport**

Sport gives athletes opportunities to acquire new skills and evaluate their abilities thanks to their participation in competition. Athletes who have high self-esteem tend to learn better and perform better than those who do not. One of the most important stages in the development of self-esteem occurs between the ages of 6 and 11. So parents, coaches and other adults who deal directly with children have an important role to play in the development of self-esteem of young people.

Even comments that seem to appear harmless to the people making them may have a significant impact on others. Parents and coaches should always try to find something the child does well, even though there are times where they must point out things that need to be improved. Positive reinforcement may focus on the way the athlete performs a particular skill or on behaviour not directly linked to performance. For example, respecting the rules, being on time, looking after equipment, making others laugh or helping others relax.

As a coach, what you say (verbally or through your body language) is extremely important in the eyes of the athletes, and you may have direct influence on their self-esteem. So, you must always assess the potential impact of the words you say to athletes or the comments you make to them.

### **Indications that a child is lacking self-esteem**

The following reactions may indicate a lack of self-esteem in a child:

- the child avoids doing a task or responding to a challenge or gives up at the first opportunity;
- the child cheats or lies to avoid losing a game or getting a poor result;
- the child shows signs of regression and acts like a baby or in an immature way for their age;
- the child behaves extremely stubbornly to hide feelings of incompetence, frustration or helplessness;
- the child makes excuses (the coach is stupid) or makes light of events (this is dumb sport anyway);
- the child moves to the fringe of society by cutting or reducing ties with other people in general;
- the child is having mood swings, appears sad, weeps, has fits of anger or frustration or has periods of silence;
- the child makes negative comments about themselves such as "I never do anything well", nobody likes me, I'm not pretty, it is always my fault;
- the child is sensitive to praise and criticism;
- the child is excessively worried about the opinion of others;
- the child is significantly affected by the negative influence of friends;

## **Helping young people develop self-esteem**

- Greet all athletes warmly when they arrive and make sure they are happy to be there.
- Show them you are confident in their ability to learn.
- Show them you appreciate them as people.
- Communicate with them in a positive manner.
- Engage them in activities that are appropriate for their level of development. Set realistic objectives and expectations based on the athlete's abilities.
- Praise athletes sincerely and often. Encourage them before making corrections. Encourage athletes to try without always putting the emphasis on results.
- Avoid elimination games and games that put pressure on them. Create situations in which athletes have a good chance of being successful.
- Be precise when you praise their efforts or performance.
- Congratulate them on their special achievements, and recognize each athlete's progress.
- Smile, wink or nod to athletes to acknowledge their efforts. A pat on the back or a high 5 is a great way to encourage them.
- Give athletes responsibility. Have them participate in decision making and give everyone the opportunity to be the leader. Alternate that role.
- Seek the opinions of athletes and encourage them to ask questions.
- Communicate to athletes the true joy of participating in sport.

## **Helping young people develop confidence and self-esteem**

### **Making comments and giving feedback at practice**

- give simple and precise suggestions
- give athletes responsibilities
- encourage athletes, be enthusiastic and constructive
- don't make it a chore - have fun

### **Before and during practices – listen to athletes**

- actively seek their input
- respect their opinion
- show you are flexible in your point of view
- value athlete's participation

### **Pre-competition communication**

- take the tension out of competition, have athletes focus on what they are going to do rather than the result
- be enthusiastic and constructive
- recognize athlete's emotional involvement and learn to listen
- remind them what works well
- tell them you have confidence in them

### **After winning a competition**

- always make some comments
- enjoy the victory
- underline what went well
- point out what can be improved on
- lay the foundation for future victories

### After losing a competition

- recognize effort
- underline the strong points
- point out what can be improved on
- play down the defeat, remind them that there will be other opportunities and that the important thing is to have done their best