

A man in a dark pinstriped suit and red striped tie is shouting into a white megaphone with a red top. He is leaning forward, his mouth wide open. In the bottom right corner, a woman with long brown hair is looking up at him with a surprised expression. The background is a solid light green color.

# Raise your SELF-ESTEEM

Stop being criticized and improve your self-image

By Rebecca Wicks

Think back to when you were a kid. Okay, so it wasn't *that* long ago for most of us. But remember those colorful, congratulatory trophies, ribbons, medals and certificates that made you feel so special? All it took back then to make you feel good, worthy and successful was a sheet of paper, something shiny or a few nice words of praise from someone bigger.





It's a different story these days, isn't it? Now we need more than even words alone can give us to satisfy our need for acceptance. And, when it doesn't come in decent enough supply, it seems at times that we're prone to crumbling in the face of criticism. And, who can blame us? Perfection is all around us and we notice it. It screams at all of us from magazines and the television – beautiful people, expensive objects, seemingly unreachable goals that torment us and make us feel sad for all the things we don't have. These days, our self-esteem takes a knocking without us even realizing it. The sad truth is... that happiness can't be bought for adults like it can easily be bought for children. It takes us longer to feel good about ourselves than it ever did before.

Young adults with low self-esteem are vulnerable to forming addictions and getting in trouble with the law. We wouldn't want that – especially as college is a stressful time – one in which we find ourselves exposed to all sorts of brand new situations and have to be at the mercy of strangers

### Raising self-confidence

Thanks to teachers and psychologists, self-esteem became a bit of a buzz word over 20 years ago. Parenting experts suggested that students who think highly of themselves do better in school, and are more likely to succeed when carrying out plans and reaching goals. That perception became deeply embedded in the brains of future parents, who in turn decided that protecting their children from failing at all costs was the "thing to do."

Betsy Brown Braun, a child development specialist in Pacific Palisades, California, says: "At the time my children were raised, we were suffering from a misguided notion that healthy self-esteem results from some-

thing extrinsic that tells you, 'You are a good person!'"

All along the west coast of America, raising self-esteem became an issue – a sort of national concern, if you like. It was hoped that greater academic achievement was the light at the end of an ever-darkening tunnel for the country. What happened instead was that the term "self-esteem" became a bit of an ideology. Schools became more concerned with feelings and making their students "feel good" about themselves than instilling an urge to learn, read, write and do all the things that bring high self-esteem to a person naturally.

Pat Green, a teacher in Houston since 1982, says: "At the time, it was said that grammar and spelling errors should be overlooked, so students wouldn't be discouraged from writing things down. It was so 'don't damage their self-esteem' to the point where you would praise things that weren't really very good."

Cassie Bryant, now 22, believes her ideas about herself and her own abilities were so transformed in school that her college days became a nightmare: "Awards motivated me and helped me get into a competitive college. But I had always been in honors in high school and the writing teacher said, 'I don't think that's a good place for you.' I started crying right there. I had never been told that before."

### Maintaining a healthy balance

Nowadays however, things are a little different. Standardized tests help put a stop to undeserved recognition and see that we're congratulated only on a job well done. Basics are taught so no one is denied the opportunity to earn praise. Having too high a self-esteem can also be quite damaging during your college days, however. Have your friends ever had to bring you

down a peg or two? Has your teacher corrected some grammar or spelling, only for you to say, "Well, it's just *her* opinion!" And how many times have you had your bubble burst? It's all about keeping a healthy balance.

But, with images of so-called perfection popping up in our faces like flashcards these days, it's easy to feel like a bit of a failure for many reasons. We have to stay grounded in order to focus on the more important things. When we're happy, we release endorphins (happy rays) that extend like little fingers, touching everything in sight. Other people sense it. Others are infected. And, in a perfect world, our happiness would light up the planet.

"Without healthy self-esteem, you could have 'everything,' but your life could still be a wreck!" shouts the homepage of the most-visited personal development Web site in the world – [www.thinkrightnow.com](http://www.thinkrightnow.com) Its pages are full of inspirational quotes to help you along the path to better self-esteem. Interestingly, the site's founders, who also offer self-help products in the form of audio CDs and courses, claim to have clients who are multi-millionaires, admired, famous, attractive, powerful people, who, in spite of all their outer embellishments of "success," have felt unfulfilled, empty and unworthy of their accomplishments. Many are actually in therapy or on heavy anti-depressants and anti-anxiety

“ Young adults with low self-esteem are vulnerable to forming addictive habits and to getting in trouble with the law. ”

### Boosting self-image

Your self-esteem is vital to your healthy development in all areas. Tell yourself you're doing pretty well to have come this far. You're at college with the whole world ahead of you. Drink less and steer clear of addictive substances. At the risk of sounding all spiritual and tree-hugging, happiness comes from an easily reachable place.

medications. A scary thought indeed. So, remind yourself that just because someone is prettier, wears better clothes, has nicer shoes or goes to more-extravagant holiday destinations than you – it's a given that peace of mind does not come from material things. That's something to think about when looking at all those images of "perfection." ☺