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HALDIMAND-NORFOLK HEALTH UNIT

# HEALTHY SCHOOLS

## Developing your child's self-esteem



Self-esteem refers to how you feel about yourself. It includes your self-confidence, self-respect, pride in yourself, and your sense of independence and self-reliance. All the ways you feel about yourself and your abilities are wrapped up in the term "self-esteem."

The more positive your self-esteem, the more successful you will be at dealing with life. Healthy self-esteem is a child's armour against the challenges of the world. Kids who feel good about themselves seem to have an easier time handling conflicts and resisting negative pressures. They tend to smile more readily, are more optimistic and enjoy life. A child who has healthy self-esteem enjoys interacting with others. He or she is comfortable in social settings and enjoys group activities as well as indepen-

dent play. When challenges arise, he or she is able to work toward finding solutions.

Self-esteem fluctuates as a child grows. It is frequently changed and fine-tuned, because it is affected by a child's experiences and new perceptions.

Young children begin to see themselves as separate from their parents as they acquire language. They begin to name themselves as "self" or "me" and use the word "mine." They are very self-centered and think the world revolves around them until about age seven. They have difficulty thinking about another person's point of view, and they even think others are thinking what they are thinking. Their brains are developing rapidly, but are still incomplete and children simply cannot think like adults. They are impulsive and do not think through or plan their actions. This is an important stage for parents to be patient and work hard to set a positive example for what they want mirrored in their children.

During the first four or five years of life, parents are the most important contributors to their children's self-esteem. When children start school, teachers and friends also become important. The more positive a child's self-esteem, the easier it will be for him or her to resist negative peer group pressures.

### Strategies for nurturing a positive sense of self for school age-children:

- Praise your child every day. Praise your child for trying to do something even if he or she wasn't successful. Give your child a task you know can be completed just so you can give the praise.
- Be specific when giving your child feedback. Tell him or her what it is that you are pleased with. For example, "You shared your toys with your sister."
- Be aware of what you say to or about your child. Avoid speaking negatively about your child in her/his presence.
- Provide opportunities for your child to make choices, and respect the choices that are made. Remember to only offer choices you believe to be appropriate.
- Encourage your child to do his or her best and emphasize effort rather than success.
- Encourage your child's initiative rather than criticize her/his attempts. For example, "I see

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- that you put your shirt on all by yourself," rather than, "You put your shirt on backwards. Now we have to fix it."
- Provide realistic expectations for your child. Understanding the developmental ability of your child at each age will help you determine if your expectations are appropriate and enable your child to feel success.
  - Acknowledge your child's feelings as important and valuable. This will enhance her/his feelings of self-worth.
  - Identify and talk to your child about feelings. Try to find out why he/she feels a certain way. Show you care even if you can't do anything about the problem. For example, "I'm sorry you are feeling sad. What happened?"
  - Model acceptable behaviours such as kindness, manners, cooperation, sharing and empathy.
  - Teach self-talk. Adults learn to weigh options mentally. Teach a child how to decide by talking out options.
  - Know what your child is learning in school. Show an interest in and talk about school subjects.

*Submitted by Melanie Holjak, Public Health Nurse.*

**Quickie self-esteem builders**

- Help your child plan and shop for a meal.
- Help your child identify a hobby.
- Talk about traditions.
- Get to know his/her friends.
- Visit libraries, museums and parks together.
- Walk together.
- Answer questions.
- Help your child learn good body habits, such as washing hands and brushing teeth.
- Read together.
- Work on a chore together.
- Play a game together.
- Draw together and talk about the drawing.
- Practice pouring, measuring and scooping.
- Play an imagination game.
- Use words such as: "You've got what it takes; how clever; well done; I like you; that's neat; you deserve a big hug; you're so smart!"

**How to handle children's behaviour**

Wouldn't life be great if all children behaved exactly the way we wanted them to every minute of the day? Imagine a baby that never cried, a toddler that never threw a tantrum, or a preschooler that never whined, bit or hit another child. Who wouldn't want an eight-year-old that never talked back and did as he or she was asked every single time? How about a teenager that didn't slam a door, argue with you and was home every night at curfew without an excuse?

Unfortunately, negative behaviour from our babies and children should be expected. It's perfectly normal. It's also normal to be completely confused as to where it comes from and how to handle it. Children come with different personalities and temperaments, and some children are easier to parent than others. About 20% of kids come with a "difficult" personality and they can be a challenge to parent. Here are some things to consider as you try to decide what strategies might work best for your children:

- I. Realize that there are no perfect parents or perfect children.

2. Recognize that most misbehaviour results from negative feelings such as anger, jealousy, fear and fatigue. Children often need their feelings interpreted for them and then be shown how to work through them positively.
3. Understand that how you treat children will affect them to varying degrees for the rest of their lives. We are products of our family of origin.
4. Children are perfect imitators of their parents, and you are their model and guide.
5. All children deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.
6. You must find a balance between being too strict and not strict enough (and that's hard.)
7. You have to be consistent (and that's harder still).

As a parent, you are your children's guide. What are you teaching them when they misbehave? What are you teaching them when you misbehave? To get good behav-

our from our children, we need to model it first. We need to teach our children what good behaviour is and then expect it from them every time, understanding that they will often need guidance and reminders frequently. We must remember to love them every step of the way and take care of our needs, too, so that we have the time and energy to give to them. The investment in time and patience in the early years will pay off as our children grow and become the adults we want them to be.

There are many different philosophies of, and approaches to, parenting. For some guidelines on helping your children learn good behaviour, here are some of the best links:

[www.kidsareworthit.com](http://www.kidsareworthit.com)  
[www.parentmagic.com](http://www.parentmagic.com)  
[www.attachmentparenting.com](http://www.attachmentparenting.com)  
[www.temperament.com](http://www.temperament.com)

Reference: Turecki, Stanley with Tonner, Leslie. *The Difficult Child* (1989), New York, Bantam Books.

*Submitted by Alanya Valters, Public Health Nurse.*

# CANADA gets a D in children's physical activity

For three years running or, at best, a slow walk, Canada's Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth - 2007 gives Canada a D grade.

## What's the problem?

Canada's Physical Activity Guide says children and youth need at least 90 minutes of physical activity everyday. Research shows that fewer than half of Canadian children and youth are active enough for healthy growth and development, yet in many cases, parents often think their children are active enough. There seems to be a huge gap between what people think and what is really happening.

Here's an example. A hockey mom with an eight-year-old playing novice rep thinks her son is getting all the activity he needs when he plays. His hockey schedule includes:

- $2 \times 1.5$  hour practices/week = 2 hours and 40 minutes ice time.
- $1 \times 1$  hour game/week = 30 minutes of ice time.

Total ice time = 190 minutes/week.

Recommended time: 90 minutes/day  $\times$  7 days/week = 630 minutes/week.

Her son is still missing 7.3 hours of physical activity (almost a full work day!) for the week. Big difference!

## What does this mean?

This failing grade will lead to big problems for our children and youth. Clearly, these low activity levels lead to an increasing rate of overweight and obesity. One quarter of Canadians age two to 17 are overweight or obese. These weight issues can lead to diabetes, cardiovascular disease, joint problems and mental health problems, making today's youth the first generation to have poorer health and a shorter life span than their parents.

Keep in mind that EVERYBODY needs to be physically active regardless of size or shape.

Daily physical activity is so very important for the healthy growth and development of our children. In addition to all the physical benefits, there is growing evidence that shows how daily physical activity can improve learning and social skills for students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and autism spectrum disorder.

## How can we fix it?

Governments, communities, schools and families all have a big role to play in fixing this growing problem. As a parent, you can:

- Keep track. Make note of how much activity your family gets everyday; use Canada's Physical Activity Guide to help stay on track.
- Be a voice. Get involved in your child's school council to make healthy changes – hot lunch, fundraising, school outing choices.
- Lead by example. Be active with your children – walk to school, hike, play in the backyard.
- Volunteer your time. Coach, referee or supervise sports teams.

**Source:** Canada's Report card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth - 2007

Submitted by Michele Crowley, Health Promoter.

### Report card highlights:

- Activity levels drop greatly as children grow older, and teenagers, especially teen girls, are less active now than they ever have been.
- Children and youth spend twice as much time in front of a screen as they do being active.
- Decreases in physical activity and increases in screen time are not only adding to overweight and obesity problems, they are now also linked with more cases of anxiety, depression and low self-esteem.

The full Report Card can be downloaded at [www.active-healthykids.ca](http://www.active-healthykids.ca).



## Speech and language problems in children

It's important for parents, caregivers and educators to be on the lookout for speech and language problems in children.

A child usually begins to use his or her first words between 12-18 months of age. It's normal for these words to be unclear; for example, "baba" for bottle; "ba" for ball. By 18 months, a child should be using at least 10 specific words. By 24 months, a child should be using more than 50 words and combining these into two-word and three-word phrases regularly; for example, "Hi, dada. Whe(re) ba go?" "No, mama. More juice, please."

- A child who uses fewer words/phrases than expected could be experiencing language delay. About half of children who are language delayed at 18 months catch up by 30 months. These kids are considered "late-talkers." The other half do NOT catch up.
- Children with language delay who do not catch up by 30 months are at risk of academic failure once they reach Kindergarten. They have more social problems and have a harder time learning to read. No parent wants this for a child.

The Haldimand-Norfolk Health Unit can help. The Speech and Language Program offers free services to all parents and preschoolers in Haldimand and Norfolk. We have sites in Dunnville, Caledonia, Simcoe, Delhi and Langton. A Doctor's referral is NOT needed.

Once your child reaches school, services can be very hard to access. The Speech and Language Program can provide services until your child enters Senior Kindergarten, but the child needs to be referred before December of his or her Junior Kindergarten year.

*Submitted by Lori Holstein, Speech-Language Pathologist.*

If you are concerned about your child's speech and language development, you can reach the Speech and Language Program by calling the Parent Info Line at 1-866-463-2759.



## Take care to pack a safe school lunch

Make sure students go off to school with a safe lunch to prevent food-borne illness. Here are some tips to help keep the food in their lunches safe:



- Wash your hands well in warm soapy water before preparing a lunch. Be sure that food preparation surfaces and utensils are clean.

- Wash all fruits and vegetables with water safe enough to drink. Scrub the surface of firm fruits and vegetables. Avoid cross-contamination between raw or unwashed foods and ready-to-eat foods.
- Use an insulated bottle to keep hot foods hot. Fill the bottle with boiling water and let it stand for a few minutes. Empty the bottle and then fill it with piping hot food. Keep the bottle closed until lunchtime.
- Cold foods should stay cold. Use a freezer pack that will keep foods cold until lunchtime. Any perishable food (meat, poultry, fish, egg) should be discarded if not eaten at lunch.
- Freeze single-sized juice packs overnight and place the frozen drink in the lunch. The juice will thaw by lunchtime and the frozen drink will help keep the rest of the lunch cold.
- Use a well insulated lunch bag. If a reusable lunch bag or box is used, wash it with hot soapy water, sanitize and let it dry before reusing.
- Always have a supply of shelf-stable foods on hand at home for easy packing. These include fresh fruits and vegetables, crackers, packaged pudding and canned fruits or meats.
- Multiple use bottles or containers should be washed, rinsed and sanitized daily. Single-use pop and water bottles should not be re-used. Preliminary research has shown that frequent washing might accelerate the breakdown of the plastic, potentially causing chemicals to leach into the liquid.
- Be sure that before your child is ready to open up the lunch, hands are washed thoroughly in warm soapy water.

*Submitted by Cathi Lanni, Public Health Inspector.*