

Parent Handbook

Increasing Self-Esteem



Purpose.

Children's self-esteem and feelings of competence are vital for both their personal growth and their educational success. Children who (1) feel that they are respected (by peers and adults) and (2) feel good about themselves are likely to learn more and behave better in the classroom. Further, if children feel good about themselves and about school, they are more likely to be motivated and persistent in their schoolwork.

The PATHS[®] Kid for Today.

In the PATHS Curriculum, there is a daily activity that is intended to increase children's self-esteem, as well as to help make PATHS more fun. This activity is called the PATHS Kid for Today and it continues throughout the school year.

Each day, a different child will be chosen to be the PATHS Kid, and every child will have an equal number of turns. The PATHS Kid will have two special roles:

1. During the PATHS lesson, the PATHS Kid will be my special assistant. This will involve helping me with materials, demonstrations, and so forth.
2. At the end of the lesson or school day, the PATHS Kid will receive a series of compliments in the following manner: First, I will give the PATHS Kid a compliment. Then the PATHS Kid will pick two children (from among those who have their hands raised) to give him or her a compliment. Finally, the PATHS Kid will give himself or herself a compliment (will say something that he or she is proud of or likes about him- or herself). I will write down these compliments on a Compliment List, which the child will get to keep and take home.

Before this activity starts, the children will learn about compliments. They will discuss what a compliment is and will talk about different types of compliments that people can give. The types of compliments they will review will include:

1. things that people do (for example, "You run fast.")
2. things people have (for example, "I like your bicycle.")
3. the way people look (for example, "I like your hair.")
4. the way people are (for example, "You're a good friend.")
5. the way people behave (for example, "I like how well you listen," "You're good at sharing"), and so forth.

The children will also discuss what people can say when someone gives them a compliment (for example, "Thank you") and how people feel when they receive a compliment (for example, sometimes proud and happy, sometimes embarrassed, and so forth).

At the beginning of PATHS, children are sometimes awkward both in giving and in accepting compliments. In addition, their compliments are usually short and concrete (for example, "I like your shirt"). Over time, however, children show increased confidence in giving compliments, as well as genuine pride in receiving them. Their compliments also become increasingly personal and abstract. For example, one child, who was usually shy, gave herself the following compliment: "I believe in myself!"

What You Can Do at Home:

1. Ask your child, "Who was the PATHS Kid today?"
2. Encourage your child to bring home his or her Compliment List when he or she is the PATHS Kid (your child should always know at least one day ahead of time whether or not he or she is going to be the PATHS Kid for the following lesson). Read the Compliment List with your child and add a compliment of your own. If you and your child feel comfortable about it, display the Compliment List in a place where others can see it (for example, on the refrigerator).
3. Remember to give your child compliments and explain why you think these things.
4. Some families like to start their own compliment time. For example, in some families, the family members exchange compliments every night after dinner. In other families, compliments are given by each member at the dinner table one night each week.

Parent Handbook

Self-Control and the Control Signals Poster



Purpose.

Self-control can be difficult for all of us! However, it can be more difficult for children, because children are not as experienced at planning ahead, handling frustration, or being able to use their thinking skills to control their behaviors when they are feeling upset. When children show poor self-control, they are likely to behave immaturely, feel unhappy, and do poorly in their schoolwork.

Being able to stop and calm down is critical, because we all know that it is very difficult to consider solutions to a problem when we are upset or confused. When we are feeling upset, we often act without thinking about our behaviors first, which often leads to further problems. In other words, learning to stop and calm down is the first step in learning how to use effective thinking skills.

Skills.

In PATHS®, the children will learn to recognize when they are having a problem. They will learn that when they have a problem, they need to stop and think, rather than act out their feelings by misbehaving (for example, by not complying, by fooling around, or by getting out of their chairs).

The Control Signals Poster.

In order to help the children develop better self-control so that they can stop, calm down, and think better, I will introduce the Control Signals Poster*. As you can see on the attached copy of this poster, there is a Red Light (Stop and Calm Down), a Yellow Light (Slow Down—Think), and a Green Light (Try My Plan). Below these three signals is a fourth step, which is “Evaluate: How Did I Do?”

When I introduce the Control Signals Poster, I will emphasize the idea of going to the Red Light first. I will explain that when we get signals from our bodies or brains that tell us that we have a problem, the first thing we need to do is “Stop and Calm Down” (go to the Red Light). Together we will then develop a list of things that we can do to calm down so that we can think more clearly about our problems.

For example, a list of ways to calm down might include such things as:

- Taking one long, deep breath
- Counting to ten
- Putting our hands in our pockets
- Saying things to ourselves like “cool it” or “calm down”
- Thinking to ourselves things like “I’m OK, I can control myself” or “I need to calm down so I can think”
- Walking away
- Going and sitting somewhere else until we can calm down

In school, we will practice using the following three steps to help us calm down:

1. We will say STOP out loud.
2. We will take one long, deep breath.
3. We will say the problem and how we feel.

We will practice using these three steps during PATHS lessons and also at relevant times during the school day.

Summary.

Of course, there are many other possible ways to calm down. The point here is to teach and remind the children that there are effective ways to calm down when we feel upset. In addition, it’s important for them to learn to use their thinking skills when they have problems. Learning to stop, calm down, and think will help your child handle the daily frustrations involved with difficulties with schoolwork and peer relationships, as well as with the type of hassles we all face each day.

What You Can Do at Home:

1. Ask your child about the three steps that he or she has learned for calming down. Discuss the idea of how important it is to calm down so we can solve our problems and feel better. You might also ask your child to color in the lights on the Control Signals Poster and then put it on the refrigerator or similar place so that you can refer to it at home.
2. When your child looks frustrated or upset, remind him or her that “maybe now is a good time to think of the Red Light and calm down.”

3. When your child shows good self-control, remember to praise him or her and say something positive to help him or her feel proud. For example, you could say something such as, "I like the way you calmed down! You really can control yourself," or "I'm proud of you! You are really growing up!" Saying these types of things to your child will help him or her feel that having self-control is something that he or she can do.
4. When your child doesn't show good self-control or when he or she has difficulty calming down (when you feel it would have been possible), remind him or her that he or she should have "thought of the Red Light" or should have "calmed down first" so he or she could think. Let your child know that you know that he or she can do it if he or she tries harder. Remember to praise your child for calming down, even if it comes after your reminder.
5. When you feel upset or frustrated, try to model calming down in front of your child. You might say something out loud like, "I'm feeling really frustrated with your behavior right now. I need to calm down and think." Children often feel confused and can't figure out how we calm down. They frequently think that calming down is "magic" or is something that only adults can do. By modeling the process for them out loud, you can show them that calming down is a skill that all of us can use when we feel upset.

*Weissberg, R. P., Caplan, M., Bennetto, L., Jackson, A.S. (1990). *New Haven Social Development: Sixth Grade Social Problem-Solving Module*. Unpublished manual, Dept. of Psychology, University of Illinois at Chicago.