

Useful Information for parents from NHS Gloucestershire Health and Care

Self-esteem

Good self-esteem and confidence is very important not only for good self-image but also for learning and the development of basic skills. Good self-esteem allows children to cope in a variety of social situations, be able to form relationships with ease and respond positively to constructive criticism and have the confidence to effect change. It is important to ensure that every child has good self-esteem to ensure that they have the confidence to cope with adult life. The following information is designed to give advice on how to develop and make use of strategies to build self-confidence and self-esteem.

What is good self-esteem?

There are a number of factors, which attribute to good self-esteem. These include:

- feeling good about yourself
- liking yourself
- feeling loved/valued
- thinking others like you
- thinking that you look good
- feeling you have a good relationship with adults and children
- you feel confident about talking about new things
- you generally enjoy life
- feeling happy
- not worrying about what others think of you
- not putting yourself down and being able to recognise and label good/positive qualities in yourself
- being able to co-operate and work with others
- being able to accept positive criticism
- feeling positive about life and knowing that you are as good as everyone else
- not feeling down/jealous of others

What is positive about me?

It is important for your child to consider what they like about themselves. There a number of different things that children can write about – it may be the colour of their eyes or hair, nice clothes, the fact that they like animals, or are kind to others. They should fill out sheet 1 and 2 at the end of the leaflet and place it in a viewable spot (back of their bedroom door or the fridge) so they can refer back to it whenever they have negative feelings about themselves.

It is essential that your child thinks positively about themselves and adapts positive thinking. Many children with low esteem think negatively about themselves. For example, they might think “I am in the lowest maths group and I feel thick and people think I am stupid”. It is vital for them to turn these thoughts around to be positive. For

example, “Everyone else in the group is in the same position so we can get the help we need. The work is at the right level for me so I will learn without feeling frustrated”. Ask your child to complete sheet 3 of the things that they think negatively about themselves and how they can change these into positive thoughts.

Making the right environment

Children who exhibit poor self-esteem may feel worthless and useless. As a consequence, they may exhibit defensive and aggressive behaviour towards others. They are generally caught up in a cycle of negative thinking which can appear impossible to break free from.

There are certainly a number of pressures placed upon children, which will have an effect on self-esteem. These include social pressures (to be popular and wanted by friends and for the older child to “look right”), to be good at sports (to be in the teams) and academic pressures (to be reasonably successful academically). For the child with dyspraxia and co-ordination difficulties these pressures may well reinforce personal inadequacies and make the child withdraw and feel frustrated.

How to make the correct environment:?

Arrange social situations in which your child can experience success. If your child for example has difficulty making friends, invite a friend (or someone your child quite likes) over and organise their time together. Make sure there are a number of different things for them to do. This could involve playing games you know your child is good at, cooking together, having a treasure hunt, making things, playing in the garden or taking them out such as to the cinema, a meal or ten pin bowling. If your child has difficulty talking to others help in the conversation by asking questions which involve more than just one-word answers. For the older child, teach your child some basic questions to ask in a conversation.

- Praise your child in a meaningful way – do not go over the top but sensitively praising good effort and skills. Ensure that the school also gives positive encouragement as much as possible.
- Show that you value and care about your child’s news and feelings make time to listen every day to what has happened in their day.
- Tell your child that you love and are proud of them frequently.
- Allow your child to make choices and to take responsibilities in the home context (see below). This could involve choosing their own clothes to wear and buy, having small jobs to do such as laying the table, tidying away. It is vital that they know who they are an important and useful member of the family.
- Ensure that your child has access to group activities where he/she is encouraged to take turns and cooperate.
- Encourage your child to give and receive compliments.
- Help to develop your child’s empathy i.e. Awareness of other’s feelings.
- Encourage your child to join in new games and activities but ensure that these are ones that you know your child will have success in.
- Encourage your child to highlight and identify good qualities in themselves and those around them.

- Ensure that adults around them promote your child's self-confidence. This could be grandma phoning when they have been successful or done well at something, a brother or other relative taking time to listen, play games, help with homework, doing jobs together. Ensure that your child is not compared to others and not told how another sibling or relative is doing better than they are.
- Consider situations and whether they are promoting your child's self-confidence. If it has not, how you can change it for the better.
- Give positive criticism. For example rather than saying "your room looks like a pig sty" try saying, "it would be useful if you could tidy one section of the room and I will then help you with another. May be we could organise the room better to help you keep it more tidy"

Taking responsibility

It is important for children to take responsibility for themselves as this will further develop their self-esteem. By giving responsibility your child will be able to:

- learn from their mistakes and successes
- adapt to change
- enable them to stand on their own two feet
- encourage them to be independent
- understand that they are an important member of the family
- enable them to draw on their own resources and to find solutions for themselves
- identify problems and concerns
- learn to make choices and decisions for themselves
- give them confidence and a positive self-image
- become more aware of other needs and situations

Some of the activities that children can do include:

- make the bed
- get breakfast
- lay and clear the table
- tidy their rooms
- choose and set out the clothes for the next day
- wash and dry the dishes
- tidy and help to look after the garden
- feed the pets
- choose their own clothes to buy
- help to make decisions about their own lives
- go shopping (for the older children)

Self-confidence for the older child

As children reach secondary school, having good self-esteem becomes more important if they are to cope with the pressures placed upon them. They have a number of social pressures such as looking right, having to be popular and wanted as friends, be good at sports and be reasonably successful academically without being seen as a boffin. Adolescents with Dyspraxia often find most of these areas difficult and will need support not only to cope with the various situations but also have and maintain a good self-esteem and self-image. The strategies listed above are just as useful for the child in secondary school as they are for the younger child. In addition, it is important that they have good self-respect. This is essential for good self-esteem and self-image. Sheet 4 provides an exercise to help build respect. Adolescents who have low levels of self-esteem may find it difficult to accept praise or positive comments from others. Alternatively, they may demand an inappropriate amount of positive feedback and attention. It is important to get a balance so that they feel able to accept genuine compliments with good grace. It is important that they understand that peers may make comments, which are in fact not compliments and they need to know how they should deal with these comments. An action plan should be developed so that they know exactly how to react and what actions need to be carried out (e.g. they may say “thank you for that comment” or ignore it and then they should walk away from the situation). In addition, they should be able to give honest and genuine compliments. Making compliments to their siblings may be an easy way to start such as saying “you were kind to do that for me” or to a friend “you are a good friend because.... ” In order to make compliments they should follow the action list below:

* **think** – what is it that I want to say

* **plan** – this is how and when I will say it

* **talk** – actually saying it

In addition, children who have low esteem often find it difficult to accept positive criticism or be able to distinguish between positive and negative remarks or comments. They often feel that when any comments are made to them “people are getting at them”. Initially it is necessary for the child to understand the difference between negative and positive criticism.

Negative criticism may be thought of as:

- people wanting to pull you down or make you feel bad about yourself
- not offering any help to improve yourself
- making you feel unhappy

Positive criticism however, may be considered as:

- being given because people want you to succeed by changing the way you do something
- being given to point you in the right direction
- it may make you feel a little uneasy to start with but it will make you a better person and help you

In order to deal with criticism, it is vital that children follow the process of:

1. **Stop and think** – listen carefully to what has been said
2. **Wait** – think carefully what has been said and decide if you think it is true and if the comments made are correct

3. **Go for it** – say how you feel and work out a solution together

[Download our handy guide to self-esteem here.](#)

Anxiety

Just like adults, children and young people feel worried and anxious at times. But if your child's anxiety is starting to affect their wellbeing, they may need some help to overcome it.

What makes children anxious?

Children tend to feel anxious about different things at different ages. Many of these worries are a normal part of growing up.

From about eight months to three years, for example, it's very common for young children to have something called [separation anxiety](#). They may become clingy and cry when separated from their parents or carers. This is a normal stage in children's development and tends to ease off at around age two to three.

It's also common for pre-school children to develop specific fears or phobias.

Common fears in early childhood include animals, insects, storms, heights, water, blood, and the dark. These fears usually go away gradually on their own.

Throughout a child's life there will be other times when they feel anxiety. Lots of children feel anxious when going to a new school, for example, or before tests and exams. Some children feel shy in social situations and may need support with this.

When is anxiety a problem for children?

Anxiety becomes a problem for children when it starts to get in the way of their day-to-day life.

"We all get anxious at times, but some children seem to live a life of anxiety, where it's not short-term and it's not just an occasional thing," says Paul Stallard, Professor of Child and Family Mental Health at the University of Bath.

"For example, if you go into any school at exam time all the kids will be anxious but some may be so anxious that they don't get into school that morning," says Professor Stallard.

Severe anxiety like this can harm children's mental and emotional wellbeing, affecting their [self-esteem](#) and confidence. They may become withdrawn and go to great lengths to avoid things or situations that make them feel anxious.

What are the signs of anxiety in children?

When young children feel anxious, they cannot always understand or express what they are feeling. You may notice that they:

- become irritable, tearful or clingy
- have difficulty sleeping
- wake in the night
- start [wetting the bed](#)
- have bad dreams

In older children you may notice that they:

- lack the confidence to try new things or seem unable to face simple, everyday challenges
- find it hard to concentrate

- have problems with sleeping or eating
- are prone to angry outbursts
- have negative thoughts going round and round their head, or keep thinking that bad things are going to happen
- start avoiding everyday activities, such as seeing friends, going out in public or attending school

See more about the [physical symptoms of anxiety](#).

Why is my child anxious?

Some children are more prone to worries and anxiety than others. Children often find change difficult and may become anxious following a house move or when starting a new school.

Children who have had a distressing or traumatic experience, such as a car accident or house fire, may suffer with anxiety afterwards. Family arguments and conflict can also leave children feeling insecure and anxious.

Teenagers are more likely to suffer with social anxiety than other age groups, avoiding social gatherings or making excuses to get out of them.

Read more about [social anxiety](#).

How to help your anxious child?

If a child is experiencing anxiety, there is plenty parents and carers can do to help. First and foremost, it's important to talk to your child about their anxiety or worries. Reassure them and show them you understand how they feel.

If your child is old enough, it may help to explain what anxiety is and the physical effects it has on our bodies. It may be helpful to describe anxiety as being like a wave that builds up and then ebbs away again.

As well as talking to your child about their worries and anxieties, it's important to help them find solutions, says Professor Stallard.

"The tendency is to say, if you're worried about that sleepover, don't go," he says.

"But what you're doing is saying, if you get anxious about something, it means you can't do it.

"It's more helpful to say, 'I hear that you're worried about this. What can you do that's going to help?'," says Professor Stallard. "Focus on exploring solutions with your child, instead of just talking about all the things that could go wrong."

Other ways to ease anxiety in children

- Teach your child to recognise signs of anxiety in themselves and to ask for help when it strikes.
- Children of all ages find routines reassuring so try to stick to regular daily routines where possible.
- If your child is anxious because of distressing events, such as a [bereavement](#) or separation, see if you can find books or films that will help them understand their feelings.
- If you know a change, such as a house move is coming up, prepare your child by talking to them about what is going to happen and why.

- Try not to become anxious yourself or overprotective – rather than doing things for your child or helping them to avoid anxiety-provoking situations, encourage your child to find ways to manage them.
- Practice simple relaxation techniques with your child, such as taking three deep, slow breaths, breathing in for a count of three and out for three. You'll find more relaxation techniques for children on the [Moodcafe website](#).
- Distraction can be helpful for young children. For example, if they are anxious about going to nursery, play games on the way there, such as seeing who can spot the most red cars.
- Turn an old tissue box into a “worry” box. Get your child to write down or draw their worries and post them into the box. Then you can sort through the box together at the end of the day or week.

When should we get help?

If your child's anxiety is severe, persists and interferes with their everyday life, it's a good idea to get some help.

A visit to your GP is a good place to start. If your child's anxiety is affecting their school life, it's a good idea to talk to their school as well.

Parents and carers can get help and advice around children's mental health from Young Minds' free parent helpline on 0808 802 5544 (Monday to Friday, 9.30am-4pm).

Read more about [treating childhood anxiety](#).

[Download our handy guide to anxiety here. \(PDF\)](#)

Behaviour

Communicating with your child

[Living with teenagers](#) can be really fun and rewarding, but there can also be some very tough times, as most parents will agree. Communication is important during both the good and the tough times. The following tips can help you form habits that will improve communication between you and your child.

Make time together

At least one meal a week could be a family meal. Research shows that eating together is an important way of cementing family relationships. If you can, use flexi-time arrangements to be at home when your child gets in from school one day each week. They may complain, but don't give up. Get them to help with cooking and washing up – working together gives a good opening for small talk and big talk.

Listen to your child

Your teen needs [space to talk](#). Teens can often find it hard to put their feelings into words, but knowing that you are listening can be enough.

Involve them

Talk about what you've been up to – not about your problems but about your daily life. If they feel included in the things you do, they are more likely to see the value of including you in the things they do.

Set some boundaries

Don't over-burden them with work but ask them to prepare the occasional meal or to run some [errands](#). They may protest but they will feel included in your life rather than

being an outsider. Remind them that adults have responsibilities and that it is easier to treat them as adults when they take some responsibility.

[Download our handy guide to behaviour here. \(PDF\)](#)

Sleep

Preparing the bedroom

- Create a cosy environment
- Dim lighting
- No screens – books to read or quiet music only, otherwise no distractions
- Keep bedroom temperature cool

Bedtime routine

It's important to set a bedtime routine that you stick to, even through the weekend. Enforce clear boundaries – be consistent and persistent.

Talk Time – choose a time outside of the bedtime routine to sit 1 to 1 with the child and discuss how the day has gone, if they have any issues/worries. This should clear their mind and have any issues out of the way so they are not worrying about these at bedtime. If the child becomes chatty at bedtime get them to use a notebook to write down any issues or tell them firmly you can discuss it at tomorrow's Talk Time.

- No screens an hour before bedtime
- May have a light carbohydrate snack, this aids sleep because they contain Tyrtophan, an amino acid which increases serotonin, the 'sleep' hormone.
- Start routine no more than 45mins before bedtime
- Prepare bedroom (as above)
- Short, 5-10min warm bath before bedtime
- Straight from bathroom to bedroom and into pyjamas
- No stimulating activities
- Story time, 1-2 stories only
- Leave the bedroom while the child is still awake
- Settle to sleep without props
- If a night light is required, use a low-wattage amber or red light (blue lights keep us awake)

[Download our handy guide to sleep here. \(PDF\)](#)

[Download our handy guide to sleep and screen time here. \(PDF\)](#)

Health Eating

Tips for parents of fussy eaters

- Give your child the same food as the rest of the family, but remember not to add salt to your child's food. Check the [label of any food product](#) you use to make family meals.

- The best way for your child to learn to eat and enjoy new foods is to copy you. Try to eat with them as often as you can.
- Give small portions and praise your child for eating, even if they only eat a little.
- If your child rejects the food, don't force them to eat it. Just take the food away without saying anything. Try to stay calm, even if it's very frustrating. Try the food again another time.
- Don't leave meals until your child is too hungry or tired to eat.
- Your child may be a slow eater, so be patient.
- Don't give your child too many snacks between meals – 2 healthy snacks a day is plenty.
- It's best not to use food as a reward. Your child may start to think of sweets as nice and vegetables as nasty. Instead, reward them with a trip to the park or promise to play a game with them.
- Make mealtimes enjoyable and not just about eating. Sit down and chat about other things.
- If you know any other children of the same age who are good eaters, ask them round for tea. But don't talk too much about how good the other children are.
- Ask an adult that your child likes and looks up to eat with you. Sometimes a child will eat for someone else, such as a grandparent, without any fuss.
- Changing how you serve a food may make it more appealing. For example, your child might refuse cooked carrots but enjoy raw grated carrot.

[Download our handy guide to healthy eating here. \(PDF\)](#)

Continence

Bladder and bowel problems in childhood and young people are very common. These problems include difficulties with toilet training, wetting and/or soiling and can affect up to 28% of all children and adolescents at any one time. Younger children are affected more often than older children, but problems can happen at any age. Parents or carers often feel as if their child is the only one suffering

The following websites have lots of information, top tips and handy guides for you and your child to manage continence issues. You will also find free helplines to get professional individualised advice. Please take time to look at the information and be aware that any changes you make may take time to show a positive effect.

- bbuk.org.uk/children-young-people/
- eric.org.uk
- stopbedwetting.org

What can I do to help wetting?

Drink more. These drinks should be evenly spaced through the day- TRY to have 2 drinks before you leave for school. (See Chart Below). This will teach your

bladder to hold more and make your kidneys work harder in the day rather than at night.

Only drink milk or water after dinner and NO drinks for 1 hour before bed. This will mean your kidneys make less wee at night and not fill your bladder.

Avoid fizzy drinks, tea, coffee, hot chocolate and blackcurrant. As they can irritate the bladder and make you need to wee more often.

Go to the toilet TWICE, before going to sleep once when you get ready for bed, and once just before you go to sleep. This will make sure you have completely emptied your bladder.

Keep a torch near your bed or a light on in the bathroom. This will make it easier to get up for a wee in the night.

You should not be wearing nappies or pull-ups to bed. If you wet the bed then help an adult to change the bedding.

If you are wet when you wake up don't forget to have a wash, bath or shower. To stay fresh and clean for school so you don't get teased.

Avoid constipation. As hard poo sitting in the bowel can irritate the bladder and make you wee more often. Drink plenty of fluids and eat a high fibre diet-vegetables, fruits, cereals etc and take plenty of exercise.

Finally– Think positive thoughts before bed “I will be dry tonight “ “I am the boss of my bladder” and think of the nice things you can do such as sleepovers and holidays.

Recommended Daily Fluid Intake (Remember, milk is not included)

Age 4-8 (male/female) – 1000 – 1400ml

Age 9-13 male – 1400 – 2300ml

Age 9-13 female – 1200 – 2100ml

Age 14-18 male – 2100 – 3200ml

Age 14-18 female – 1400 – 2500ml

NICE 2010 Nocturnal Enuresis The Management of Bedwetting in Children and Young People (Guideline 111) National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence. Butler R2007 Cracking the Puzzle of Bedwetting UK Quadrant Design and Print Solution ERIC 2010 Helping Children and Families Who Strive To Overcome Continence Issues Product Catalogue 2010 Education and Resources for Improving Childhood Continence Bristol.

Our Values

working together | always improving | respectful and kind | making a difference

Get in touch with us

Edward Jenner Court, 1010 Pioneer Avenue,
Gloucester Business Park, Brockworth,
Gloucester, GL3 4AW
0300 421 8100

ghccomms@ghc.nhs.uk

Useful Links

[Work For Us](#) | [Privacy Notice](#) | [Useful Contacts](#) | [Cultural Awareness](#)

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Better Care Together

Gloucestershire Health and Care NHS Foundation Trust was formed in October 2019, following the merger of 2gether NHS Foundation Trust and Gloucestershire Care Services NHS Trust. The two Trusts joined together to provide integrated mental health, physical health and learning disability services to communities.

Our other sites

- [Gloucestershire Community Dental Services](#)
- [Gloucestershire Wheelchair Assessment Service](#)
- [Severn & Wye Recovery College](#)
- [Mental Health Services for Children and Young People](#)
- [Hope House Sexual Health Services](#)
- [Sexual Assault Referral Centre \(SARC\)](#)
- [Working Well - Occupational Health](#)

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