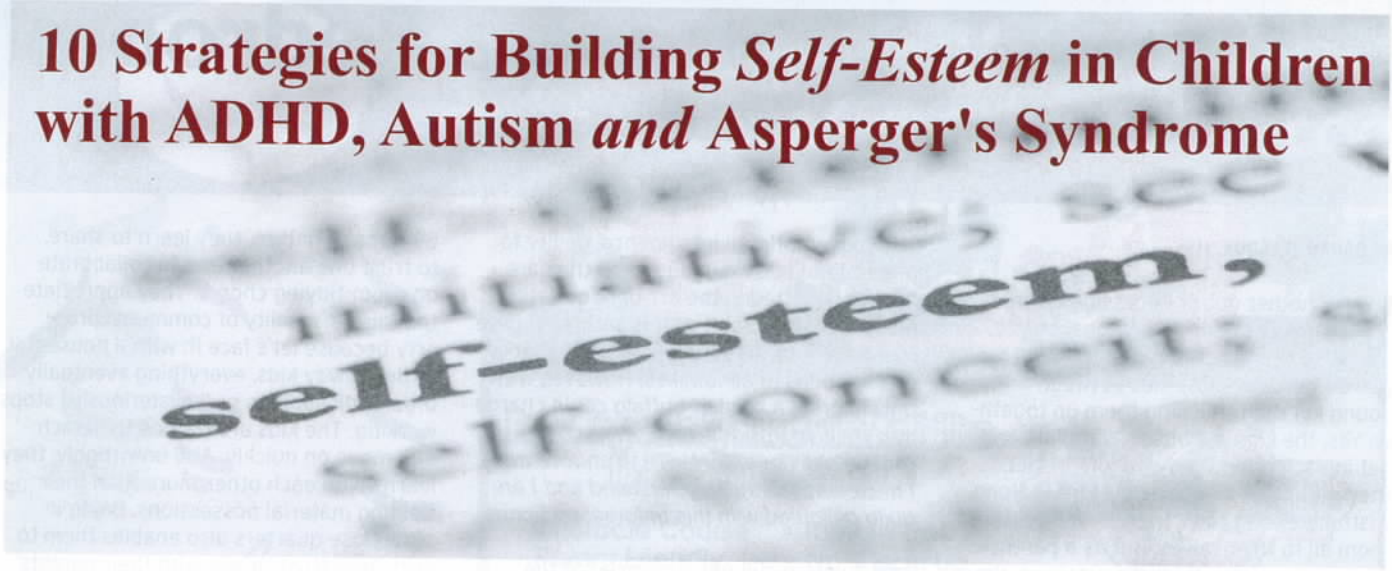
10 Strategies for Building *Self-Esteem* in Children with ADHD, Autism *and* Asperger's Syndrome



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Children with neurological disorders often struggle with their self-esteem. Their feelings about themselves can be impacted in a number of different ways, from social struggles, bullying, or due to consequences and negative attention they receive. Especially for higher functioning individuals, their self-esteem can be affected due to increased insight and recognition of feeling "different." These children often have many strengths, talents, and abilities, though these can be overshadowed by social struggles, negative behaviors, or perceived deficiencies. Though they have legitimate difficulties, it is important to reinforce their proficiencies to help them excel while building confidence. Here are 10 strategies to help increase self-esteem in children with neurological disorders:

1 View your child as valuable and good. Through language and your interactions with them, they will be able to tell if you are faking compliments about them. They will require empathy as opposed to sympathy. Feeling sorry for them will only make them feel bad about themselves, though if they feel that you understand them, they can gain self-confidence. This will include loving them for who they are as opposed to expecting them to be something they are not.

2 Maintain safe and consistent routines with your child(ren). This structure can create a comfort zone to help them organize their daily schedules.

3 Make your home a safe, comforting and loving environment for your child and family. This will create a safe haven in which to live.

4 Model positive self-esteem and self statements for your child. As children with autism often repeat what others say, the more constructive things they hear from you the more positive things they will say themselves!

5 Help them learn feelings and affectionate words and effective ways to express themselves. Then, encourage them to share their own thoughts, feelings or indifferences.

6 Inform important people in your child's life (family, teachers, professionals, etc.) about the techniques you are using to help reinforce strategies and concepts in multiple environments.

7 For high functioning children with autism, Asperger's or other neurodevelopmental disorders, finding other intelligent peers, especially those on the autistic spectrum who share similar interests and hobbies, can help mitigate the negative impacts of feeling left-out or stigmatized.

8 Acknowledge and celebrate successes and accomplishments. Praise them for daily achievements and for larger accomplishments as well. Remember to reinforce their positives to build self-esteem in this area.

9 Help your child learn positive coping strategies, such as self-talk, deep breathing, imagery to help envision themselves being successful, or other techniques to improve self-esteem. In an article entitled, ADHD and Lowly Self-Esteem, Douglas Cootey noted that, "if you haven't learned to laugh off the gaffes, you might either adopt an insouciant attitude over time, or internalize the criticisms."

10 Constant correction of their behaviors can be perceived as criticism and could lead to your child(ren) believing that there is something inherently wrong with them. Therefore, it will be important to convey to them that you are trying to change a negative behavior while reinforcing the overall positive nature of who they are and the strengths they possess.

As much as possible, make the aforementioned ideas and concepts a part of you and your child's lifestyle. As opposed to them being "interventions" you use to "help them" they will simply become a part of how you and your family operate on a daily basis. This will be much less stigmatizing and can help create a healthy lifestyle that targets the entire family as opposed to a particular individual.

*Resources: *Building Self Esteem in Children with Autism and Asperger's Syndrome by Karen L. Simmons*
** ADHD and Lowly Self-Esteem by Douglas Cootey*

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