

Self Esteem - Its Role in Nursing Education & Practice

Saramma Samuel

*If you touch me soft and gentle,
If you look at me and smile,
If you listen to me talk sometimes before you talk,
I will grow, really grow.'*

Self-esteem is the individual's evaluative appraisal of self. In the broadest sense it is more or less synonymous with such concepts as self worth, self-respect and personal acceptance.

Abraham Maslow distinguishes two types of esteem needs. Esteem derived from others and self esteem. Esteem from others is primary, apparently it is difficult for us to think well of ourselves unless we are assured that others think well of us.

Externally-derived esteem can be based on reputation, admiration, status, fame, prestige or social success - all characteristic of how others think of us and react to us. When we feel a sense of internal or self-esteem we are confident and secure in ourselves, we feel worthy and adequate. Whenever we lack self-esteem we feel inferior, discouraged and helpless in dealing with life.

Development of Self Esteem
Strokes are the currency of recognition. In order for infants to survive and grow physically and mentally they need to be touched, fondled and shown recognition. This physical handling stimulates the release of growth hormones from the adrenal cortex of the brain. Infants who do not receive this

type of recognition have been seen to be retarded and may even die. Recognition of existence of another person is termed as psychological stroking. Positive strokes are good to receive; they create a sense of well being in the giver as well as the receiver. This is the early phase when self-esteem begins to take birth. Negative strokes have the opposite effect, creating a negative feeling in the receiver but not necessarily in the giver. Since strokes are so essential to our well being we will accept negative strokes rather than have none at all.

Self Esteem and Learning
Several thousand years ago a social critic chronicled the sad plight of our society and in particular the failure of its educational system. He said, our students have grown lazy and are disrespectful of authority, they criticise others excessively and are equally ill disposed towards their own efforts. Hence not surprisingly - Institutions are little more than jails.

Education must be founded on systematic interaction in how to think more than what to think. Educational institutions must foster a will to learn and relearn; in effect they must develop a capacity for life long self-renewal. Students must be encouraged to believe in them and in the validity of their own thought process. The challenge therefore is clear. Not

only must schools accelerate the acquisition of knowledge, but also they must do it in such a way that students become the Masters - not the prisoners of their knowledge and develop the confidence to transform it for the right purposes. Hence teachers must foster confidence in their students. Self-esteem is not something separate from performance but rather integral to it. It is through achievement that academic self-confidence grows; increased confidence in turn promotes achievement by inspiring further learning.

Educational institutions offer the first major opportunity outside the home for a child to test his abilities and to gain admiration and respect. Success reinforces the pursuit of excellence and leads to an increasing sense of competency. A success-oriented student steadily gains confidence in his abilities, whereas the student who encounters failure is most likely to blame it on insufficient efforts or on others.

Children who are categorised as falling into the high self-esteem group have the following characteristics: they tend to be active, to be successful socially and academically and have high levels of aspirations for leadership. They are creative and able to express opinions with little anxiety, and show interest in public affairs. The teachers' willingness to

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trust students will in turn motivate them to perform better.

Self Esteem - Its Implications in Nursing Practice

The expanded and extended role of a nurse enables her to function better in the hospital, community, educational institutions, industries, old age homes, hospices, orphanages to name a few.

The *community health nurse* plays a vital role in improving the self-esteem needs of the community. She imparts knowledge, helps in changing health behaviours that are detrimental to health and empowers the community members to own responsibility for their own health.

The *school health nurse* handles delicate issues such as menarche, the change in voice, body image changes etc. with

great sensitivity and thus improves self-esteem of the adolescent.

In the hospital the new environment brings in the fear of the unknown in terms of loss of self-identity, which can degrade one's self-esteem. A *professional nurse* can inculcate a feeling of belongingness and worth thus building self-esteem in her clients.

In the maternity ward the confident behaviour of the *obstetric nurse* can aid a new mother handle and experience her bundle of joy with pride, develop confidence in new activities such as breast-feeding and neonatal care thus enhancing the mother's self esteem needs. The dying client also has self-esteem needs; the professional nurse recognises these and provides privacy by involving the family members who in

turn fulfil his self-esteem needs.

Conclusion

Self esteem is not static; it is affected by a number of factors such as pregnancy, birth, abortion, drugs, mental retardation, neurological deficits, mutilating surgeries etc.

A nurse as a teacher aids to build self-esteem of her students by validating the efforts put in. Her willingness to trust her students will cause the students to believe in their efforts and thus ignite the desire to work hard and succeed.

Let us make learning a delight for our students and enable them to believe in their ability to achieve giving due credit for efforts taken to complete a task and not just the final scores received in an examination.



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