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Developing a Positive Self-Concept in Foster Care Youth: 2016 Final Report

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Elizabeth A. Stevens

2016 Final Report

Developing a Positive Self-Concept in Foster Care Youth

Low self-esteem is not uncommon in youth within the child welfare system. This occurs, at least in part, because they in general come from neglectful or abusive family backgrounds and have little to no support from their parents. Feeling worthwhile is necessary for youth to develop positive self-esteem and succeed personally and in school. Those who have low self-esteem feel unsure of themselves and have difficulty in several areas of life. This project focused on reviewing the process of self-esteem development and then also provides resources that parents and caseworkers can both use to help youth develop healthy self-esteem. These resources include examples of activities and the links to go directly to printable worksheets and more detailed directions.

As children grow, they need to learn to feel capable, effective, and accepted. The experiences that they have either build self-esteem to a healthy level, or create a negative self-concept. To develop healthy self-esteem, children need guidance and sometimes intervention from the adults in their lives. Promoting a child's self-esteem can be accomplished, according to KidsHealth.org, in four ways: help your child learn to do things, praise your child wisely, be a good role model, and avoid harsh criticism. In addition, it is valuable and sometimes imperative that foster children receive additional work on self-esteem. In addition to conversation, activities that emphasize positive views of self can strongly assist parents and caseworkers in raising a child's self-esteem.

Activities covered in this project focus mostly on writing and creating. For example, a simple activity for a child can consist of having the child name 5 things that they like about themselves. These 5 items can be listed on a worksheet by the child if they are old enough, or written by an adult if they are not. A discussion can then take place about these 5 items, helping to solidify the child's concept of self. Other activities can include tracing the child's hand and decorating the paper with words and pictures that create a positive representation of self. It is both the activity and maybe more importantly, the discussion about the activity, that aid in the development of positive self-esteem.

Teenagers notoriously struggle with self-esteem and can also benefit from activities and from the discussion that should accompany them. For example, learning to reject negative thoughts and writing positive substitutions is an exercise in changing negative self-talk. Creating detailed portraits of themselves with written descriptions, collages, and drawings can also aid in helping teens discover a more positive self-esteem.

Although this presentation separates activities for children from activities for teenagers, most all can be used with either age group with minor alterations. An important aspect

of using activities includes giving the client an opportunity for self-discovery. Children or youth that are particularly non-verbal or insecure may be easier to communicate with when using a written or artistic activity. Caseworkers and parents can use the examples provided and they can also further search many of the resources cited in this presentation to discover additional ideas. It is hoped that foster youth will benefit from an adult taking the time to examine how they feel about themselves, realizing that how one thinks about oneself can lead to either a positive or a negative future in the adult world.