

From Integrity to Self-Esteem:

Where does self-esteem come from? Self-esteem is the sense of personal worth that comes from being valued as a respected individual in our childhood by primary caretakers. As a respected individual your parents support your independent pursuits. The parent should fulfill none of their own needs while supporting these pursuits outside of the satisfaction that comes from seeing their children build a healthy sense of independence and personal excellence.

However, not all parents are so good at helping their children build self-esteem. They lose perspective of where their ego stops and their children's ego begins. Two things seem to happen when this occurs. The parent works to prevent the child from experiencing failure because the parent inappropriately interprets the child's failure as his/her own failure. The child starts to see his achievements as a way to win approval from his parents and does not adequately internalize his success as esteem. The result is the child does not know how to make himself feel good about himself.

So how does one begin to build an internal sense of esteem? For starters, self-esteem should not be tied to external success like money, awards, and recognition. External measures of success are too unpredictable to create a stable sense of self. Internal measures of success are the secret to developing a sustainable self-esteem. Personal integrity is the internal measure that I have found works best for creating self-esteem in individuals who did not receive this gift in early childhood. Integrity comes from making small promises to yourself about actions you will take on your own behalf and then keeping those promises. The results of your actions are not as important as fulfilling your participation in the action itself. If you say you are going to exercise three times a week, do it. If you say you are going to go out to the bar for a drink and not to get drunk, do it. If you would like to look into changing your major, or studying abroad, follow through on these inquiries. Remember, the results of your actions are secondary to the actual following through on the action. The action is within your control, the result... not always. Personal integrity, as it applies to committing to and following through on an action, creates a sense that you are reliable and that you can be master of your own fate. Self-esteem comes from the sense that if you want something you know that you are likely to be able to make it happen. Try taking these actions and see how you feel about yourself. Remember that actions do not guarantee results, but they do ensure we are playing the game.

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