



# Mental Health Association of Northern Kentucky

A LEADER IN PROVIDING ADVOCACY, EDUCATION, AND SERVICES THAT PROMOTE MENTAL WELLNESS

EDUCATION AND SCREENING OUTREACH PARTNER FOR THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MENTAL HEALTH AND  
NATIONAL MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

513 Madison Avenue, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Covington, KY 41011 859-431-1077 or [www.mhanky.org](http://www.mhanky.org)

## Teen Self-Esteem Feeling Good About Yourself

### **Self-esteem: What does it mean?**

“Self” - that’s easy. That’s you! “Esteem” - this word is a bit trickier. It means to “to hold in high regard” which means to really like a lot.

*Self (you)-esteem (to like a lot)...means you really like yourself a lot, both inside and out...how you look as well as what you believe in.*

This is also called “positive” or “high” self-esteem. But you sometimes feel dumb or start wishing you were someone else. This is “low” or “negative” self-esteem.

**Self-esteem...means you like yourself...all the time, not just when things are going great!** The good news is you can learn to like yourself or have positive self-esteem all the time. You are the one in control; you can make the difference. But sometimes, you let others tell you how to feel about yourself. From the day you were born, your parents, then teachers and friends, have been influencing your decisions. TV shows and music videos tell you what to wear and how to look. Your music and magazines tell you how to feel and how to act.

**So why is it important to have positive self-esteem if everyone is going to tell you what to do?** As a teenager, you now have more responsibility to choose between right and wrong. Your parents are no longer constantly by your side. Positive self-esteem gives you the courage to be your own person and to believe in your own values when the pressure is on to make a big decision.

**Your friends can put a lot of pressure on you.** You want to be part of a group or crowd. Belonging to a crowd is a part of growing up, learning to be a friend and learning about the world around you. It’s OK to want to be liked by others. But not when it means giving in to pressure. Your friends are now making many of their own decisions. And their decisions may or may not be good for you. It’s never worth doing things that could hurt you or someone else. For instance, drinking alcohol or using other drugs, having sex before you are ready, joining a gang, or quitting school can all lead to trouble. Think about what can happen if you give in to the wrong decision. Drinking and driving can lead to serious injury or death. Sex may lead to pregnancy, STD’s (sexually transmitted diseases) or AIDS. Joining a gang may lead to illegal behavior and maybe jail. And quitting school takes away your best chance to be successful later in life. It’s not always going to be easy to stick to your values, but you will be happier if you do.

**Think for yourself!** Only you know what's best for you. If you let your friends think for you, you'll never get where you want to go. When you value and respect yourself, it helps you from making a bad decision which may affect the rest of your life.

***Feeling good about yourself helps you to:***

**Accept challenges.** Try a new sport or audition for the school play. If you don't make it, you will at least enjoy trying and learning more about yourself!

**Enjoy your life.** A happy outlook helps you to make and keep new friends.

**Believe in yourself.** If you think you can do something, you are more likely to do it!

**Stay flexible.** Life is changing all the time. You can't stop it, but you can learn to live with it.

***How do you get positive self-esteem?***

- **Be honest with yourself.** Figure out what your strengths and weaknesses are. Don't beat yourself up over your weaknesses. Don't compare yourself to others. Accept yourself.
- **Set realistic goals for yourself.**
- **Enjoy yourself when you have achievements.**
- **Trust your own feelings.**
- **Take one day at a time. Do your best each day.**

***Do you know these answers?***

1. **Is it easy to change your self-esteem?** No. It means taking some time to understand who you are - what you like, don't like, feel comfortable with, and what goals you have. Ask for help from your parents, a school counselor and your friends to find the answers.
2. **Does self-esteem guarantee success?** No, but if you keep trying and doing your best, you are a success. Remember, having positive self-esteem will help you to achieve what you want. But when you don't succeed, it helps you to accept the situation and move on.
3. **Does positive self-esteem mean "being stuck-up, snobby, or on an ego trip"?** No. Kids who act this way usually are trying to pretend they are something they are not. In fact, they often have low self-esteem.
4. **Can I help others feel good about themselves?** Yes. Don't put others down for how they feel. Be patient with your friends and family when they fall short. We all make mistakes from time to time.

**If you need help, where do you go?**

If you are having a hard time deciding what is the right thing to do, look to your parents or a teacher or counselor to help. Watch, question, and learn from them. They want to help you. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness. Adults expect kids of all ages to ask for help.