What You Need to Know...

Self - Esteem:  
Feeling Good About Yourself

What does it mean?  
"Self"-that's easy. That's you! "Esteem" -this word is a bit trickier. It is not a word that most young people use on a daily basis. If you look it up in the dictionary, you will find-- "Esteem- to hold in high regard" which means "to really like a lot." For example, you really like your best friend or your grandmother. You get the picture. These are people you trust, respect and enjoy spending time with.  
So, let's look at the word self-esteem again.  
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. Sometimes it's easy to like who you are. You feel great when you score a goal, ace an exam, or tell a joke that everyone laughs at. But, how do you feel about yourself when you just said something mean, or when you think you got a bad haircut? You start wishing you were someone else or that you could change how you look. You think you aren't good enough...in school, on the team, or for the cool crowd. 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 family, then your teachers and friends, have been influencing your decisions. TV shows, movies, music videos and magazines influence what we wear, how we feel and how we act.  
So why is it important to have positive self-esteem if everyone is going to tell you what to do, what to wear and what to think?  
As a young adult, you now have more responsibility to choose between right and wrong. You become accountable for your actions. 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 group 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, abusing alcohol or 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 or doing drugs and driving can lead to serious injury or death. Unprotected 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 is not always going to be easy to stick to your values, but you will be happier if you do.

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Think for yourself!
Only you know what is best for you. If you let your friends think for you, you won't be working toward your personal goals for your future. When you value and respect yourself, it keeps you from making bad decisions that may affect the rest of your life.

Feeling good about yourself helps you to:

Accept challenges. Try a new sport or audition for a play. And if you don't make the team or get the lead in the play, you will at least enjoy trying and learning more about yourself!
Enjoy your life. Happy people are fun to be around. A happy outlook helps you to make and keep 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 change with it.

OK. You think that having "positive" self-esteem is a good idea. How do you get it?
- 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. Learn to accept yourself.
- Set realistic goals for yourself. Try to get the most out of your strengths without demanding or expecting too much of yourself. Take one day at a time.
- Do your best each day.
- Trust your own feelings. Listen to yourself. Pay attention to your emotions.
- Enjoy yourself when you have achievements. Celebrate your successful efforts. Don't downplay them.

Do you know these answers?
1. Is it easy to change your self-esteem?
2. Does self-esteem guarantee success?
3. Does self-esteem mean self-centeredness or being stuck-up?
4. Can I help others feel good about themselves?

Is it easy to change 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. This takes time and hard work. It's a life-long process, but it's worth the work!

Does self-esteem guarantee success? Success in school? Success playing sports or musical instrument? Success with friends? No, but if you keep trying and do 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.

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.

Can I help others feel good about themselves? Yes. Don't put others down for how they feel, look or act. Be patient with your friends and family when they fall short. We all make mistakes from time to time.

If you are having a hard time deciding what is the right thing to do, look to your mom or dad or a favorite teacher or counselor to help. Learn from them. They want to help you. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness. You are never too old or too young to ask for help.

For more information or referrals for community services contact your local mental health association or MentalHealth@mhacolorado.org www.mhacolorado.org

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