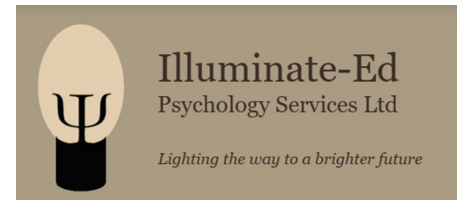


## Top Tips: Supporting pupil self-esteem in school



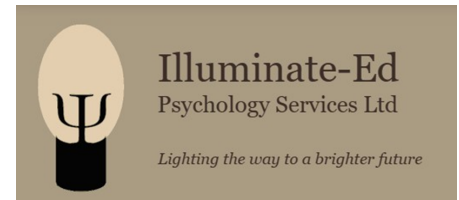
### What is self-esteem? And why is it important for me as a teacher to think about it?

In order to learn, pupils have to constantly push themselves to step out of their comfort zone and try something new and unfamiliar – something they may not be able to do as well as they believe/expect they should. Self-esteem (confidence and belief in yourself and your abilities) is vital to enable them to engage with such risk-taking. Unfortunately, some pupils do not have good self-esteem for a variety of reasons. Here are some key ways you can support children in your class to build and maintain their self-esteem.

### Supporting the learning process:

- **Adopt the mantra “*Practice makes progress*”** rather than “*Practice makes perfect*”. Everyone can make progress; this is what we want. Few will ever achieve perfection; striving for this is unrealistic and sets us all up to fail.
- **Model error-making and practice forgiveness** (to self and others).
- **Celebrate errors.** Create a culture/environment where errors are actively celebrated as evidence of effort, trying or steps towards learning rather than evidence of failure. You may want to set up an ‘error-of-the-week’ award for errors that led to interesting discussions and learning opportunities that everyone benefitted from. Or perhaps you could make a ‘hazard zone’ on the wall so that pupils can if they wish (anonymously) post errors they have made; building a collective resource to help everyone avoid making the same mistakes in the future. Model error-making yourself for added impact!
- **Ensure all work is appropriately differentiated** in relation to the child’s known needs. Consider what you know from *prior assessments* (formal, observations, work completed, etc.). Differentiate by:
  - resources (think about language, grammar, length/complexity)
  - By task (think about using pictures, diagrams, objects, etc. as well as resources such as number lines and word lists, dictionaries, thesauruses, plenaries, etc.)
  - environment - does this need to be done at the desk? - can it be done somewhere else instead? - in silence/with calming music in the background? - in a different room? - outside?
  - outcome - can they achieve the same learning by doing a different task with a different end result? (e.g. a model, a piece of acting or a PowerPoint presentation instead of a lengthy piece of writing)
  - time - some children just need longer - others may not be able to work for as long - yet others may need brain breaks or movement breaks building in
  - teaching approach/method - is there another way to teach this?
  - feedback - use a range of indirect and exploratory feedback methods e.g. discussing, exploring, questioning. Non-verbal feedback such as facial expressions and hand gestures can be just as effective and avoid drawing unwanted peer attention.(NB additional staff training/support available on differentiation if required)
- **Offer appropriate choice/control in work tasks.** Focus on the ‘how’ rather than the ‘what’ and ‘when’ of tasks. *E.g. White paper or blue paper? Using pencil or pen? In your book or on the iPad? Working with me or (named peer)?* If the pupil really needs to feel in control of what they’re doing, you could offer two similar tasks (e.g. *these 10 sums or those 10 sums?*)
- **Provide additional thinking time to generate responses** in group discussions. Try using a “*coming back to you*” approach to facilitate this.

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- **Check pupils' understanding before leaving them to work independently.** There is nothing worse for self-esteem than thinking you've understood instructions, working diligently on them for 15 minutes only to find out you've misunderstood the task and wasted your time on things that aren't required/valued. Check understanding before this happens. Ask them to tell you in their own words or "show me" rather than simply repeat instructions, as the latter can be misleading. Explain any misunderstandings as your fault, not theirs (*"I clearly didn't explain that very well"*) and offer additional/alternative explanations. If necessary, try doing one together first.
- **Offer help (where needed) using the language of 'would you like?'** rather than 'do you need?' This creates opportunity for children to deny they *needed* support and helps protect their image with peers.
- **Give vicarious support where possible.** Find ways wherever possible for the child to 'overhear' or see support being given to others rather than them - this avoids drawing unwanted peer attention. Sitting close to a TA working with another child may help.

### Building collaboration and trust:

- **Build relationships.** Get to know your pupils personally. Make a point of finding out about their interests and activities. What TV programme do they like? Are they doing anything fun this weekend? Ask them about them afterwards if you can – show you take an interest in them and value them.
- **Focus on rewarding positive behaviours** rather than issuing sanctions for undesirable behaviour. Be vigilant - watch out for them (they won't always be easy to spot!) Aim for a ratio of *at least* 6 positive comments to 1 sanction/corrective comment (more if possible).
- Create **opportunities for pupils to make a valuable contribution** to the class/school. This will help that pupil (and peers) recognise strengths and think about the pupil positively. Roles, responsibilities and duties as well as show-and-tell opportunities can be helpful. Encourage explicit recognition and praise from all affected by the pupils' contribution.
- **Use keep-in-mind strategies** to provide reassurance that the pupil is being remembered and valued even when staff are not working directly with them. This will also provide much-needed reassurance that they are doing the 'right' thing. (e.g. *"I'm coming to you next"* or *"It looks like you're doing a super job on this one"* or *"I can see you're using some good resources"* etc.)
- **Avoid carry-over of poor behaviour.**
  - Create opportunities for pupils to make amends for inappropriate behaviour and move back-up the behaviour chart. However, beware the pupil who feels the need to do too much – moderate their expectations and make the solution fit the problem.
  - Adopt a fresh start approach. View each day, session, lesson and task as a new beginning.
- **Try to avoid whole class feedback** as this facilitates self-peer comparisons which may not be positive for this particular child.
- **Focus on rewarding performance rather than end results.** Rewarding effort and progress rather than marks achieved will ensure that even children with the lowest ability stand an equal chance of gaining recognition.
- **Look for opportunities for the child to 'be the teacher' rather than the student.** This doesn't need to be in relation to the academic curriculum but might involve them sharing information about their hobbies and interests outside of school (e.g. sporting prowess).

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### Giving good news:

- **Give frequent positive feedback** both during and on completion of tasks.
- Adopt a **SMART SOUPER** approach. Devise SMART targets and share them with the pupil at the outset of tasks. To maximise impact feedback should be SOUPER:
  - Specific: “~~Good work~~” v “*You used 3 interesting adjectives off your list*”
  - Observable: “*Look. Here, here and here.*”
  - Undisputable: “*That’s one more than last time*” or use I-statements which cannot successfully be rejected. E.g. “*I like it*” or “*I found it very interesting.*”
  - Pertinent: To avoid inadvertently drawing attention to what has *not* been achieved, feedback should be directly and explicitly linked to the SMART targets shared with the pupil at the outset of the task. For example, avoid giving feedback on SPAG if the outcome was to record 3 interesting facts about a topic.
  - Emotional: Support the child to make a positive emotional connection with the work. *What did they enjoy most? What was most interesting? What are they most proud of? What would they like to do again/show a loved-one? etc.*
  - Reflection: Support the child to take ownership of their achievement for themselves rather than ‘deflect’ it to the efforts of those around them. A focus on process rather than outcome is likely to be most helpful here. *What decisions did they make? What resources did they choose to use? Did they manage to avoid distractions well? Was that helpful? Would they do it again next time? etc.*

NB: Live Marking strategies can be consistent with this. There is no need for the pupil to respond positively or for you to engage in ongoing conversation with them. Over time, repeatedly hearing these positives will help build self-esteem.

- **Use a jam sandwich approach to marking.** The child needs to hear corrective feedback, of course. But that needs to be within the context of a wider, positive experience. Begin and end with positives. Fill in between with a gentle, positively-phrased, corrective suggestion:
  - I really liked.... and ... *(the bread)*
  - It could have been even better if you had... *(the jam or sweetener)*
  - But .... and ... were great! *(the bread)*

This means that the first and last things a pupil hears are both positive which strengthens the positive impact. The child still hears the corrective element but being embedded within a message that contains four times as much positive feedback makes it more emotionally-accessible to them.

### Supporting positive self-reflection:

- **Encourage pupils to focus on their own progress over time** and avoid comparing themselves to peers. Colourful charts recording progress or a ‘good work folder’ may be helpful (these should be reviewed and discussed positively with the child periodically)
- **Provide emotional checking in/out times** between transitions (e.g. home:school, lesson:lesson, playtime:lesson).
- **Provide a worry-box** as a whole-class strategy. Pupils may need you to help ‘sort’ the worries to really let them go. The story book “*The Big Bag of Worries*” provides a helpful structure for this.
- **Support and promote independence.** Highlight for/with them the good things they are doing to help themselves (in learning or any other challenges they face). Encourage and support them to try that for themselves next time. *(Separate information sheet and staff training available with additional strategies for supporting independence. Please enquire).*