

DEVELOPMENT OF 'SELF- IDENTITY' 'SELF-CONCEPT' 'GENDER ROLES'

Introduction

I am sure you have been asked several times about who you are. What comes immediately to mind is our name. Our name is our identity.

Then normally we may say about our parents, place where we live or hail from, place where we work and so on. These are called demographics. They describe us, but do not represent what we really are.

If somebody asked you to talk about yourself (Tell me about yourself), then you will give more details than just the demographics. You will now talk about your likes, dislikes, ambition, achievements, attitudes, and so on.

Each person has an idea about who he or she is. Self-concept can be defined as the view one has of herself and her abilities. Generally, self-concept embodies the answer to "Who am I?"

One's self-concept (also called self-construction, self-identity or self- perspective) is a collection of beliefs about oneself that includes elements such as academic performance, gender roles and sexuality, racial identity, hopes, fears, talents, desires, goals, expectations and many others.



It includes one's ideas about one's character such as good, helpful, strong, fair, tolerant, and so on.

It not only includes how one sees oneself but also how one thinks others view him/her and how he/she would like others to view him/ her.

Self-concept is related to self-image, self-esteem, and self- confidence.

Self-image, often used interchangeably with self-concept, is the subjective perception of one's body and personality

Self-esteem regards oneself as a worthwhile person or having a positive evaluation of oneself.

Self-confidence is an attitude that allows individuals to have positive yet realistic views of themselves and their situations.

Self-confident people trust their own abilities, have a general sense of control in their lives, and believe that, within reason, they will be able to do what they wish, plan, and expect.

What are the effects of a healthy self-concept?

A healthy self-concept is the foundation for the positive development and over-all well-being of a child.

When a child has a healthy self-concept, he sees himself as being loved, loving, and valuable. A child with a healthy self-concept is also better able to reach his full potential. He does better in school.

He is better able to set goals for himself and make decisions.

He is more willing to learn new things and try new activities. With a healthy self-concept, a child has better relationships with family members and friends. He can control his behaviour and get along with others.

How children see themselves also influences how they act. When children have favourable self-concepts, they demonstrate confident and sociable behaviours.

How does self-concept develop?

A child's self-concept begins to develop at birth. It begins with how adults respond to him / her. Parents and caregivers create a healthy self-concept through positive emotional bond with an infant through warm and caring interactions with a lot of eye contact and touch.

As the child grows, her ability to interact successfully with her environment promotes a healthy self-concept. This is critically important in early childhood. The development of a positive self-concept at an early age empowers the child to feel competent, try new things, and strive for success.

When the child enters school, there is a transformation. The environment is expanded, performance demands increase, unguided, unsupervised peer interactions increase.

If at the preschool level a child has a positive self-concept, the child is able to meet these demands with pleasure and success; else the child is thwarted with fear and anxiety.

Main factors that affect the development of self-concept

Parenting style influences self-concept. Children of authoritarian parents tend to have low self-esteem, lack empathy, are unable to internalize moral standards, lack independence, and are weak in establishing positive peer relationships.

Children of encouraging and participative parents tend to respect others and they are respected, empathize as they are empathized with, establish good peer relationships as they are confident of themselves and empathetic towards others.

Parent's self-concept often influences the child's. Parents who do not have a positive self-concept tend to dominate or pamper the child and the child develops a confused view of the world around.



Parents with a positive self-concept are able to deal with the child appropriately. They are generally encouraging and endearing; but are at the same time stern and firm, scolding or disciplining when required.

Also, parents with a positive self-concept become role models and the child comes to imitate them.

If elders are properly encouraging and consistently disciplinary, children are more likely to develop positive self-esteem while becoming more responsible and will follow through on assigned activities.

If not allowed to decide which activities to perform, children may begin to feel guilt upon taking initiative and end up with an inadequate self-concept.

Unconditional acceptance is very important for the development of a positive self-concept. It occurs in close or familial relationships, and involves a consistent level of affection regardless of the recipient's actions.

It is neither approving nor disapproving of someone based on their behaviours or characteristics but rather accepting them without judgement.

When there is such unconditional acceptance of a person – the child, then disciplinary actions of elders – scolding, reprimanding etc., is seen as related to a particular action that is wrong or undesirable and does not get generalised.

The child understands, that he is valuable, loved and cherished; but at the same time wrong doings or bad habits will not be tolerated.

Social influences on the development of self-concept are also important. Self-concept consists of at least two "levels," a personal identity and a social identity.

Children begin integrating social comparison information – social identity - into their own self-concept in primary school years by assessing their position among their peers. Peer acceptance has a significant impact on one's self-concept. It affects children's behaviour and academic success

Let us look at some aspects of self-concept

I am a nice person: The child's sense of acceptability gets defined. The child enters the school with the question: "Will they like me?". At home the child may be the only child or among the two or three in an adult world.

He may have been tolerated and even pampered. But once in school, he sees a whole sea of kids like himself. Perhaps he never knew that there were so many kids in the world; or may have not even given a thought to it.

Now, he must find a place among equals – and worse still many – all – of them come with the same anxiety, fear and confusions that he has.

Parents, teachers and elders play a very important role here. Teachers must engage in cooperative games and encourage partnerships and friendships and must take extra effort to get a shy or anxious child to participate with confidence by accepting and not demanding higher levels of performance.

At the same time some children take time to blossom out. This should be understood and children should not be pushed. Every child must be made to feel wanted, loved and special.

Feedback influences self-concept: As children enter the school- age years, transition from the world at home to that of the school happens. Children can now receive feedback from outsiders about their accomplishments.

If children can discover pleasure in intellectual stimulation, being productive, and seeking success, they will develop a sense of competence. If they are not successful or cannot discover pleasure in the process, they may develop a sense of inferiority and feelings of inadequacy that may haunt them throughout life.

Social development in children and subsequent emergence of self- concept is thus related to effectiveness and feedback from interacting with materials, caregivers, peers, teachers, and others in the environment.

Competence = Confidence: According to Eric Ericson, this is the age of competence building. It is a time of industry Vs. Inferiority. If competencies are not developed and encouraged, the child will develop a self-concept of inferiority. Giving opportunities to a child to do things for himself will help him to develop a 'can-do' attitude.



Let's use the example of a child working on a puzzle and having trouble finishing it. One might say, "Looks like you can't do that puzzle. Why don't you forget about that one and try something easier?" This leads to a „can“t do“ self-concept.

Or one might offer encouragement and help. "You've got several pieces in the right place. If you keep working on it, I'm sure you'll get it. Look at this design. You need a piece with this type of cut. Let's see if we can find it." This leads to success and a „can do“ self-concept.

Children with a negative self-concept have a "can't do" attitude. They become frustrated easily and give up on difficult tasks. They must start to believe in their ability to complete tasks without help, or with minimal help.

They should be provided with opportunities for success by giving child age-appropriate tasks that the child can complete on his own. Having done so will give her a sense of pride and help build a "can do" mentality and positive self-concept.

Success breeds success and promotes a positive self-concept. Both success and failure can have a significant impact on an individual's self-concept. Individuals often form their self-concept based on past experiences of success or failure.

Success leads to a positive self-concept while failure erodes it.

Hence it is important for elders to give success opportunities for the child by way of designing and providing for activities that a child can perform with success.

These activities should not be too easy or the child will develop a false sense of self-worth and competence and then find that in real life situations he is not as successful as he thought he was. This can be very devastating to a child's self-esteem and harm his self-concept.

These activities should not be too very challenging that the child is unable to deal with them. This will create a „can't do“ attitude and a negative self-concept.

Activities that are just a little above the child's level of performance; he can succeed it with a little extra effort or help will lead to a positive self-concept of confidence and competence.



Expectation becomes reality: A child will do some things right and some things wrong. This is only natural. What is reinforced stays and what is not just disappears. The key responsibility of parents and teachers at this stage is to strengthen the strengths and the weaknesses will automatically get eroded. Criticism erodes self-confidence.

Mistakes must be corrected. This is a must. But they need to be corrected by showing what is right, by encouraging what is right. When a child is encouraged to the right thing in the right way, he will feel good about himself and continue to strive to develop that positive self-concept.

Elders must have faith in the child's abilities while remaining close by to offer confidence and assistance as required. There is a strong relationship between adults' beliefs about children and children's beliefs about themselves.

"I am important – so are others": Children at this age are transitioning out of the egocentric "me" stage, to a stage in which they have a greater understanding of the "me" a part of a group. It is not always an easy transition.

Children can vacillate between having patience and understanding the needs of the group, to wanting their own needs met-now! Adults must help children see how their needs will be met within an appropriate time frame. One way to do this is to play turn-taking and transition games.

A self-concept of a strong considerate and fair person grows as opposed to weak submission out of self-denial or aggressive domination out of inconsideration and insensitivity.

I am good and right: Children with a positive self-concept do not exhibit problematic behaviours as doing so would be against their positive self-concept. Children for whom being "naughty" or "bad" is a part of their self-concept exhibit behaviour problems.

How can elders help children develop a positive self-concept? They should be mindful of the language that they use to describe your children.



Do not label them with words such as 'lazy', 'naughty', 'aggressive', or 'stupid.' Instead, look for and point out your child's strengths Show your children that you have faith in their goodness and in their abilities.

This is a matter of language choice. For example, if a child, out of frustration, hits another child, one might say, "You naughty child! How can you be so mean! That was real bad!" Or, one could say, "It's not ok to hit. I know you didn't mean to hurt him.

You got angry and hit him. Say sorry and from on never hit anybody. Strong, nice people never hit." This will help the child to learn that one could do mistakes, but should not repeat them.

It will also help the child to develop a self-concept of a strong and nice person.

Academic self-concept - Knowledge is delightful and is strength. Giving the child the opportunity to explore the environment, ask questions without feeling like a nuisance, and engage in make- believe play activities helps in developing a strong academic self-concept.

It is important for a child to develop a self-concept of an interested and intelligent learner. This is not only important for school success; but even more so for success in the knowledge and technology driven world.

Academic Self-Concept (ASC) refers to the personal beliefs one develops about his academic abilities or skills.

By age 7 or 8, when children begin evaluating their own academic abilities based on the feedback they receive from parents, teachers and their peers and develop their ASC.

By age 10 or 11, children view their academic abilities by comparing themselves to their peers. These social comparisons are also referred to as self-estimates. Self-estimates are frequently utilized to help one form an idea of oneself

ASC is an important factor in the ease with which one learns new concepts. This is particularly important in the context of academic success determining many important aspects of adult life such as the course they take in higher education and the career path they choose.

Due to the significant impact ASC has on a person's life, it is important that the school should foster a positive academic self- concept development in children.

Parents and teachers need to provide children with specific feedback that focuses on their particular skills or expressed abilities in order to increase ASC.

Learning opportunities should be conducted in a variety of mixed- ability and like-ability groupings that down-play social comparison because too much of either type of grouping can have adverse effects on children's ASC in the way they view themselves in relation to their peers.

It's ok to be not ok. The right to be wrong is very important. One may fail. One may make mistakes.

But one can and needs to always correct oneself. Failure is also a learning tool for children. In fact, children with positive self-concepts who experience failure can accept mistakes or weaknesses because they know they are overall competent.



Self-respect is important: With dominating elders, children tend to lose or not develop self-respect. When self-respect is lost (or not developed), the potential for violence and

deviant behaviour is fostered. Children who feel powerless often behave destructively towards themselves and/or others.

This acting out is an undesirable attempt at gaining some control over their environment. A child's growing need for self-Determination and a strong self-concept must be respected, appreciated and encouraged.

While self-concept is about "who I am," self-respect is more about "how I take care of myself." A strong sense of self allows children to be able to speak up if they think something is not fair, if they are being ignored, or even if they don't feel well. The key word is respect.

As their self-concepts grow to include self-respect, children learn that what is fair for them also has to be fair for those around them. This is when and how a child learns that he is not a lonely fish in the big pool.

He sees that he is actually one of many different fish that work together to create a harmoniously flowing sea.

Expressional skills strengthen self-concept: One of the greatest developing skills a child has is his ability to communicate. Language, now at this stage, has grown beyond basic verbal skills, to include the ability to communicate feelings and needs. And this is exactly the time to encourage language.

Children often need to "talk out" their feelings and problems. They must be given the opportunity and the guidance to do so. This is an important part of developing a positive self-concept.

A child who can and is allowed to express himself confidently develops a positive self-concept of a valid person while a child who is denied this develops a self-concept of inferiority.

Self-concept is learned. As far as we know, no one is born with a self-concept. It gradually emerges from the early months of life and is shaped and reshaped through repeated experiences, particularly with significant others.

The fact that self-concept is learned has some important implications. Since self-concept does not appear to be instinctive, but is a social product developed through experience, it possesses relatively boundless potential for development and actualization.

This makes it a hundred percent responsibility of teachers and elders to ensure that every child develops a positive self-concept.

Summary

- Each person has an idea about who he or she is. Self-concept can be defined as the view one has of herself and her abilities.
- One's self-concept is a collection of beliefs about oneself that includes elements such as academic performance, gender roles and sexuality, racial identity, hopes, fears, talents, desires, goals, expectations and many others.
- It includes one's ideas about one's self-such as being good, helpful, strong, fair, tolerant, etc.
- It not only includes how one sees oneself but also how one thinks others view him/her and how he/she would like others to view him/ her.
- Self-concept is related to self-image, self-esteem, and self- confidence.
- How children see themselves also influences how they act.
- When children have favourable self-concepts, they demonstrate confident and sociable behaviours.
- A child's self-concept starts developing from birth through interaction with significant elders.



- As the child grows, successful interaction with the environment promotes a healthy self-concept.
- Parenting style, encouragement from elders around, unconditional acceptance and social influences all have an impact on the development of self-concept.
- Every child must be made to feel wanted, loved and special; and feel "I am a nice person".
- Feedback influences self-concept
- Competence = Confidence
- Success leads to a positive self-concept while failure erodes it.
- Expectation becomes reality.
- Children must grow up to learn "I am important and so are others.
- Children with a positive self-concept do not exhibit problematic behaviours. Children for whom being "naughty" or "bad" is a part of their self-concept exhibit behaviour problems.
- It is important for a child to develop a self-concept of an interested and intelligent learner. Academic self-concept is an important aspect of one's self-concept.

- Children with positive self-concepts who experience failure can accept mistakes or weaknesses because they know they are overall competent.
- Self-respect is an important aspect of self-concept.
- Expressional skills strengthen a positive self-concept.
- Self-concept is learned and not instinctive. This makes it a hundred percent responsibility of teachers and elders to ensure that every child develops a positive self-concept.