

Self-esteem

Help your daughter keep and build it

By Amanda N. Wegner

Research shows that one's self-esteem in childhood sets the stage for adulthood; however, girls' self-esteem peaks around nine years of age, then decreases.

"Younger girls don't know any boundaries," says Sara Pickard, executive director of Girls on the Run of Dane County, an organization that helps girls ages 8 to 12 cultivate a healthy lifestyle and self of sense through running and other activities. "Slowly that comes out of children."

There are a number of reasons for this: social pressure, higher perceived societal worth of looks and physical attributes, portrayal of women in media and more. Low self-esteem can lead to a host of issues, including low self-worth, inability to make decisions and think for one's self,

even a greater disposition for abuse. It's important to help our daughters and the young women in our lives maintain and cultivate a high self-esteem. Luckily, there are several organizations that, as a core part of their missions, help families help girls maintain and build self-esteem.

Girls' Biz

GIRLS' BIZ provides girls in sixth through eighth grades the opportunity to develop and run their own business. After deciding on, creating and packaging their product, the girls pitch and sell their product to members of NAWBO-Greater Madison, which program director Sally Hestad says is a safe first step in building their confidence. As GIRLS' BIZ is associated with the NAWBO-Greater Madison program, it's a guaranteed sale.

Eventually, GIRLS' BIZ takes its product to the community and the local business women's expo, where there are no guarantees.

The whole process, from start to finish, is designed to build entrepreneurial and team-building skills. And confidence and self-esteem are an important part of that.

"Here are these middle school-aged girls making transactions with business people and adults," says Hestad. "Talk about a confidence and self-esteem builder!"

More info: Informational meetings Tuesday, Sept. 8 and 15, 6:30 to 8 p.m. at the Girl Scouts of Wisconsin-Badgerland Council Center, 2710 Ski Lane, Madison. www.nawbomadison.org, click on "Community Page."

Girls on the Run

Girls on the Run (GOTR) uses running to address personal and relationship issues for girls in grades three through five: managing emotions,



Photos courtesy of Girls on the Run of Dane County



speaking up and expressing opinions, respecting diversity and other people's opinions, the importance of a healthy lifestyle and more.

"It is so much more than a running program," says Pickard. "It's not designed to create track stars or be a feeder program; the running is the vehicle to deliver the self-esteem message and help girls prepare for adolescence and the tough days ahead."

GOTR runs two 10-week sessions; one in the fall and another in the spring. An after-school program, girls meet twice a week. There are programs at schools around Madison, as well as in many surrounding communities.

GOTR isn't just about putting in miles. Girls participate in activities to talk, share and learn.

"We do a lot of sharing," says Pickard. "They are so expressive at this age and have a lot of opinions and feelings."

The season culminates with a 5K run. This fall, GOTR of Dane County is offering its first community run, the New Balance Girls On The Run 5K on Saturday, Nov. 14, at Waunakee Village Park.

More info: GOTR registration began in early August; programs do have a maximum registration, so visit www.girlsontherun-daneco.org for information.

Girl Scouts

With its girl-led model, self-esteem is at the core of Girl Scouts' programming, says Ti

Gauger, program specialist with Girl Scouts of Wisconsin-Badgerland Council.

Girls, says Gauger, have much responsibility. From choosing which badges they are going to work on individually to planning activities within their troops, "they take charge of what they want to do and learn, and those real-life decisions and responsibilities help build self-esteem and a lot of confidence for girls."

The message of self-esteem is also woven into the Girl Scouts' curriculum in a variety of ways, including the Journeys program, which is being rolled out, as well as Power Up, a bullying prevention program for older girls.

More info: Girls can participate as part of a troop or individually. Scholarships are available. Visit www.gsbadgerland.org.

Talk about self-esteem! Amanda N. Wegner, a freelance writer, yoga teacher and creator of Yoga for Bigger Bodies, www.yogaforbiggerbodies.com, spends half her time in strappy yoga tops.

Parents are important, too!

Here are seven ways to build and encourage healthy self-esteem, adapted from the New York University Child Study Center:

- Monitor your own comments about yourself and your daughter.
- Get dads involved.
- Watch your own stereotypes; let daughters help fix the kitchen sink and let sons help make dinner.
- Encourage your daughter to speak her mind.
- Let girls fail; this requires letting them try. Helping or protecting them, especially if done by dad, can make a girl feel incapable or incompetent.
- Don't limit girls' choices. Interest, not expertise, should be motivation enough.
- Get girls involved with sports/physical activity. It can reduce their risk of chronic diseases, and regular physical activity can enhance girls' mental health, reduce symptoms of stress and depression, make them feel strong and competent.

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