

SO WHO YOU LOOKIN' AT? [self-image and self-esteem]

THIS WEEK

Self-esteem is a huge concern among teenagers. They feel so much pressure to fit in and they worry about their looks, how they act, and if they'll be accepted and liked by their peers. This TalkSheet gives your group the opportunity to discuss self-image and self-esteem and will give you a chance to affirm your kids.

OPEN

Everyone needs to hear affirmations, so have your group give each other a pat on the back—but not literally. Ask each person to trace his or her hand in marker on a piece of 8½ x 11 paper. Then have them tape the papers on each other's backs. Make sure each group member has a pen, pencil, or marker to write with. Then, encourage them to walk around and write something they like about the person in the hand. Although compliments like "I like your shirt" or "cool sneakers" are nice to hear, ask your kids to think of a less superficial comment—maybe something about their personality or talents. Give the group enough time to write on each person's back. Then let the kids read their own papers and share how this activity made them feel.

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. Don't ask the kids to share their personal answers. Instead, have them think about their answers and what they've learned about themselves. A person's self-image is usually based on how they think others feel about them. Communicate to your kids that they can control how they feel about themselves.
2. Ask the kids to share the traits they are proud of. Or have them share what they would be proud of if they were the person on their right. Keep the focus on personal qualities and accomplishments.
3. Discuss each issue in general terms without asking for their individual answers. You might ask the kids to answer as if they were a typical high school student. They may open up more if you share how you felt about yourself as a teenager.
5. This tension-getter gives you a chance to talk about how to handle others with low self-esteem. What are different ways of handling the situation? How do girls and guys handle these situations differently? What would a guy do if he were Roni?
6. Ask volunteers to read these passages aloud. Do these verses make any difference to them? How do they feel knowing that God loves them unconditionally?

THE CLOSE

Communicate clearly that everyone—even those who look like they have it all together—struggle with self-image. Even parents and adults still feel badly about themselves from time to time. Challenge your kids to begin seeing themselves as God sees them—as his children who he loves. In fact, God commands us to love ourselves as they love others (Leviticus 19:18). It's important to him that they respect and love ourselves as he does!

Emphasize that God has created each of them with potential—and he will use them if they give their lives to him. There are several biblical characters who struggled with self-worth, including Moses (who had a speech impediment) and Paul (who apparently wasn't very handsome and had a "thorn in the flesh"). If they keep putting ourselves down, God can't use us to our fullest and best.

Point out that it is hard to keep a positive self-image when the media tells us otherwise. TV, radio, movies, advertisements tell us how to act, look, dress, what products to use, how to be popular, and who to hang out with. They are constantly bombarded with messages that tell us they aren't good enough. But they have control over it—they can keep things in perspective with God's help.

God created us in his image. He loves us, cares about us, and died for us. He loves us as they are, not for what they think they should be.

MORE

- What do your kids think about themselves? Ask your kids write a letter to themselves in a self-addressed stamped envelope. Encourage them to write down how they feel about themselves, what they struggle with, and what they'd like to change. Remind them not to be too hard on themselves—no one is perfect. Challenge them to set goals for themselves of what they'd like to work on to improve their self-image. Examples could include not putting themselves down mentally, getting involved in a new group, volunteering their time and building better friendships. Send these letters to your kids after a couple of months. How are they doing? What changes have they made?
- Or check out what the media says about self-image. On a poster board or whiteboard, ask the group to list specific attitudes and messages that the media sends about self-respect and self-esteem. What pressures to your kids feel from the media and others? How do these pressures affect their self-image and that of other teens? How can they resist what TV, radio, the Internet, and movies are telling them?