

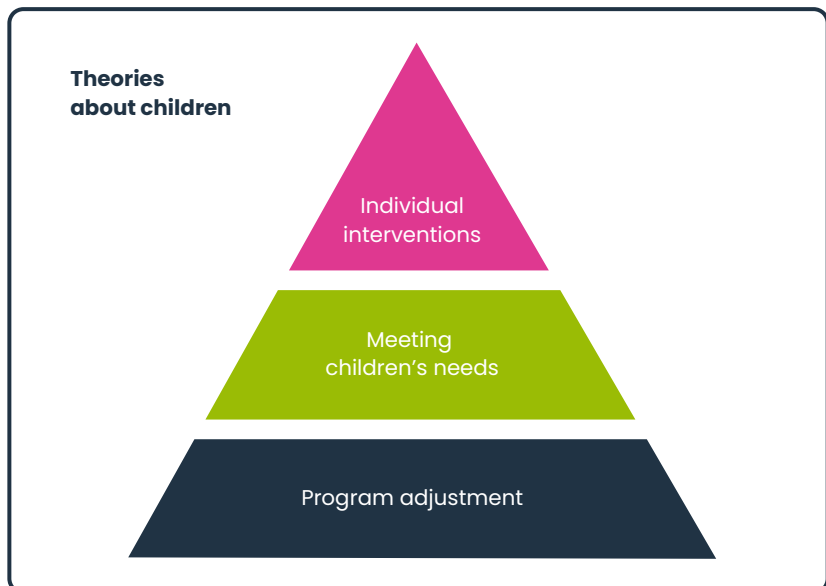
GUIDING CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOUR

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LAYERS OF PRACTICE



When responding to children's behaviour, we cannot start with individual interventions, but first need to ensure that the program is achievable by the children and that we are meeting their needs.

Achievement of these steps rests on an understanding (or theory) about children

TWO STYLES OF DISCIPLINE

The **authoritarian**, behaviourist or controlling style uses rewards (praise, treats, stars, merit awards, pocket money, access to a preferred activity) and punishments (reprimands, time out, corporal punishment) to induce children's compliance.

The **authoritative** or guidance approach uses no rewards or punishments but instead teaches children to act considerately.

Thus, the core difference between the two styles is their use of consequences (rewards and punishments).

CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING THE TWO STYLES

- **Politics (power relationships):** who has the power and whose voices are silenced.
- **Effectiveness.**
- **Ethics:** we should not engage in practices that humiliate or disempower children.

POLITICS

Behaviour management practices reflect imbalances of power between adults and children. These power imbalances are frequently legitimised – in the case of the discipline of children, on the grounds of their developmental incompetence. Some groups are served by the maintenance of this power imbalance. In education, children are marginalised and disadvantaged by them.

EFFECTIVENESS

- the disruption ceases
- similar disruptions are less likely to recur in the future
- the miscreant learns something positive through the process of correction – such as how to solve problems
- there are no unintended side-effects that could disadvantage the miscreant – such as increased fear of adults, feelings of intimidation, or being defined by peers as 'naughty' and so being rejected by them
- there are no spillover effects for onlookers – such as intimidation about how they would be treated if they too made a mistake
- there are no spillover effects for adults – such as a loss of their humanity or violation of their own principles
- there are no deleterious effects on the adult-child relationship as a result of how a misdemeanour is handled
- children develop healthy attitudes to authority.

ETHICS

In relation to children, I will (AECA, 1991, p. 4):

- recognise that young children are vulnerable and use my influence and power in their best interests
- engage only in practices that are respectful and provide security for children and in no way degrade, endanger, exploit, intimidate or harm them psychologically or physically.

Caring *about* and caring *that* rest on a conscious attemptor moral commitment to be an exemplary person, whose personal relationship with children is reciprocal.

Caring is a choice to place a premium on children's wellbeing, over control.

It represents fidelity to adults' moral obligation to be responsive to children's needs.

ATTITUDE TOWARDS BEHAVIOURAL VERSUS DEVELOPMENT ERRORS

BEHAVIOURAL ERRORS

Children are trying to get things wrong
Their errors are deliberate.
Children should not explore limits:
They should obey them.
Children should not make behavioural mistakes.
Children who have difficulties achieving behavioural expectations should be punished.

DEVELOPMENTAL ERRORS

Children are trying to get things right:
Their errors are accidental.
Learning requires the exploration of limits.
Mastery requires teaching and practice and inevitably will entail mistakes.
Children who do not meet developmental expectations need additional support.

CAUSES OF BEHAVIOURS THAT CHALLENGE US

CONTROLLING

External causes:

Desired behaviours are not being rewarded enough
Undesired behaviours are not being punished enough
Undesired behaviours are accidentally receiving rewards (e.g. attention).

GUIDANCE

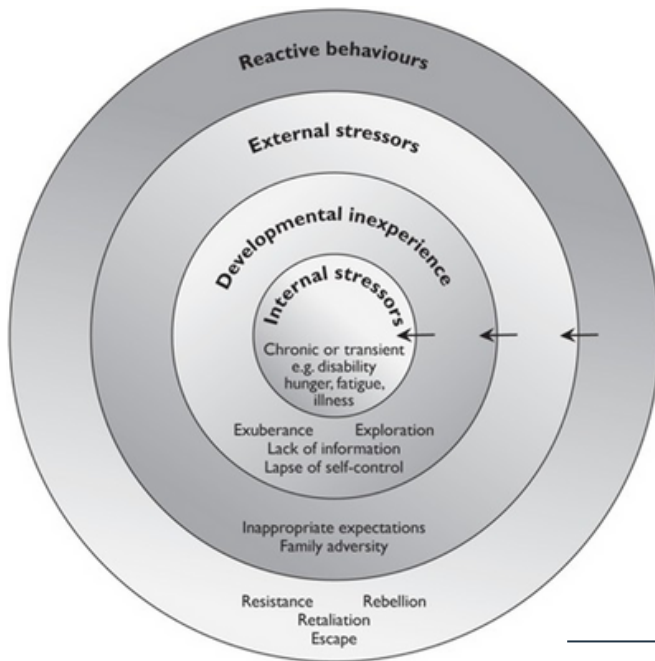
Developmental inexperience:

- Natural exuberance
- Exploration
- Lack of information
- Lapse of self-control

Reactive behaviours:

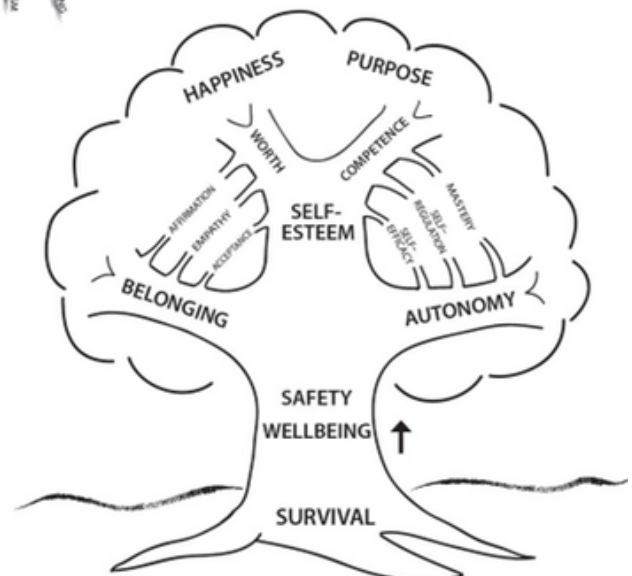
Resistance, rebellion, retaliation, escape

SOURCES OF BEHAVIOURS THAT CHALLENGE US



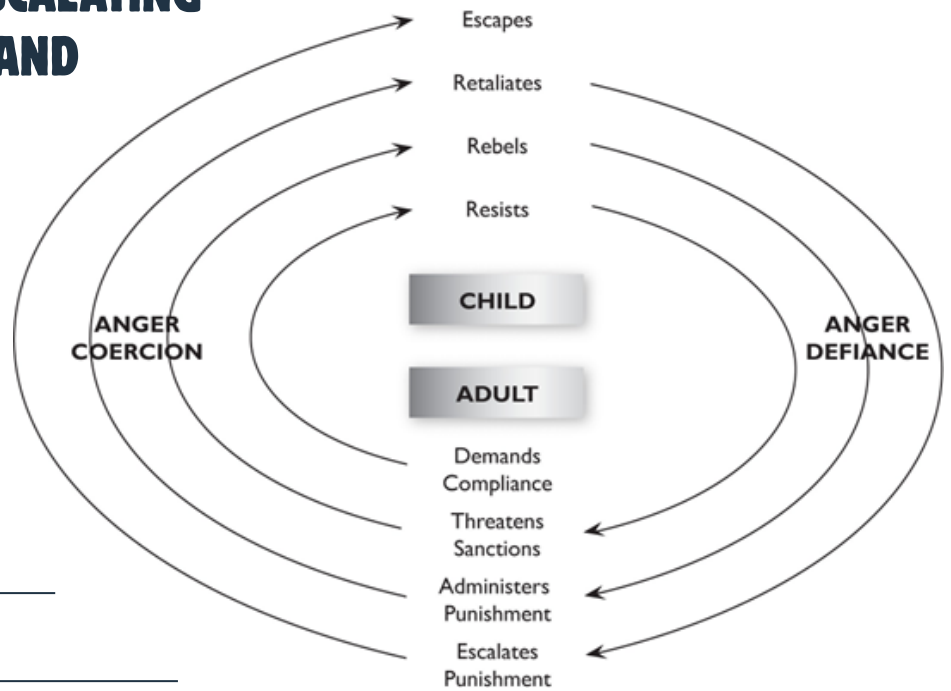
MEMORY TEST

MODEL OF HUMAN NEEDS Porter (2014, p. 140)



THE 'DANCE' OF ESCALATING ADULT COERCION AND CHILD DEFIANCE

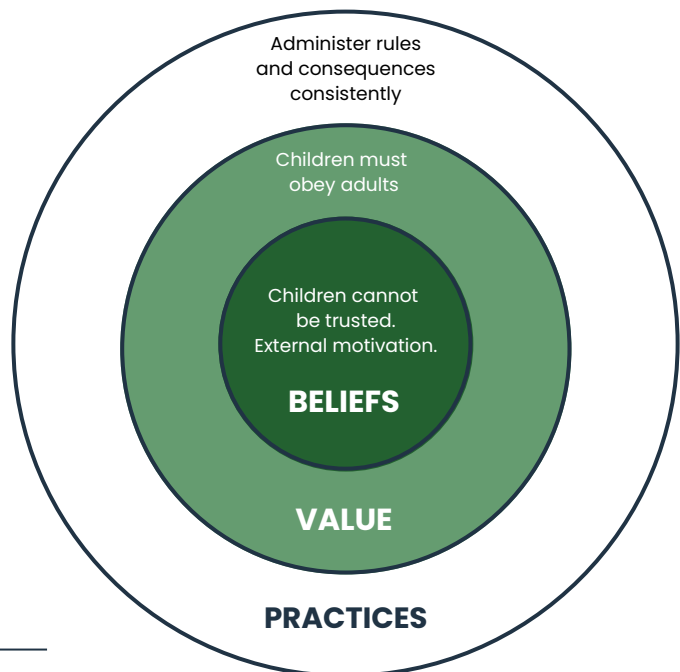
Porter (2014, p. 149)



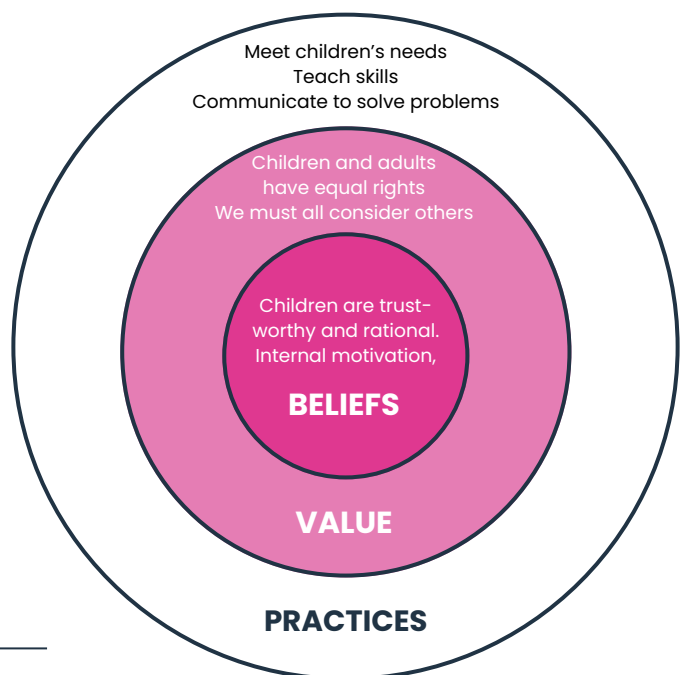


CONTRASTING PRACTICES

THE CONTROLLING APPROACH



THE GUIDANCE APPROACH



CONTRASTING STYLES

THE CONTROLLING APPROACH

BELIEFS

- Distrustful, negative beliefs about children
- Humans are controlled externally

VALUES

- Respect is one-way
- Children have fewer rights than adults
- Respect is conditional
- Aims for obedience
- Children are bound to adults
- Judgmental
- Adult is the boss, with coercive power

PRACTICES

- Teach the rules
- Administer consequences
- Be consistent

THE GUIDANCE APPROACH

BELIEFS

- Trusts that children are cooperative, empathic, rational and want to grow
- Humans are controlled internally

VALUES

- Respect is reciprocal
- All people have equal rights to get their needs met
- Respect is unconditional
- Aims for considerate behaviour
- Children are separate beings
- Compassionate
- Adult is a leader, with expertise and wisdom

PRACTICES

- Meet children's needs
- Communicate to solve problems
- Support children's self-regulation

PROGRAM ADJUSTMENTS

Children's natural group size = their age (in years) + 1

Group times, therefore, should not exceed this number.

Concentration span for adult-led activities = 3 minutes x their age in years

Up to a maximum of 20 minutes.

Young children's brains use between 40 and 50 per cent of the glucose that is available in the blood. For their brain to have sufficient fuel, they need to eat every 60 to 90 minutes.

Children's bodies are *meant* to be moving: to give them strength, balance and confidence. Their minds are built for autonomy and are *meant* not to be held captive. This means that for most of their day, children *must* be free to move, to choose where and how to play.

Disadvantages of large group times

- Large groups necessitate a lot of managerial talk and directives from educators.
- Children who arrive first must wait for the remaining children to assemble.
- Large group sessions violate children's comfortable group size.
- They especially overwhelm children with sensory integration difficulties, for whom the sessions can be overwhelming.
- They usually exceed children's concentration span.
- Typically, during large group sessions, one-third of the children are engaged;
- one-third dip in and out intermittently; and
- one-third are actively disruptive.
- As a result, a 'boundary rider' is needed, whose job it is to make children stay where it is the last place they want to be.
- Some children with additional needs get to opt out, but meanwhile are disruptive. The language cannot be tailored to the developmental level of each child.
- The language cannot be reciprocal.

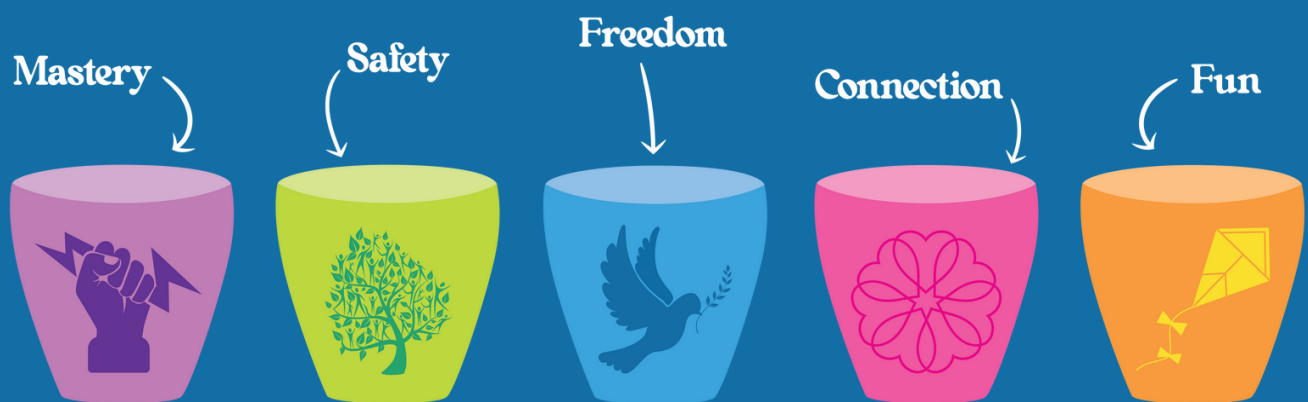


STRATEGIES TO MEET CHILDREN'S NEEDS

To truly understand and support children's behaviour, we must first understand that behaviour is motivated by unmet needs. The Phoenix Cups® framework offers a powerful metaphor for exploring these needs, using the idea of five distinct Cups: Safety, Connection, Mastery, Freedom, and Fun. Each Cup represents a basic human life need, and our behaviours are often attempts to fill these Cups.

We all have needs, or 'Cups' that require filling.

There are **five** psychological needs represented as Cups: The Safety Cup®, The Connection Cup®, The Mastery Cup®, The Freedom Cup®, and The Fun Cup®.



THE
Phoenix CUPS®

We are driven to fulfil these needs – that is, we have the 'will to fill' our cups. As adults, one (or maybe two) of these might consistently be our highest priority – that is, our largest cup/s.

Nevertheless, any cup that is being emptied at a given point in time will be the cup (or need) that is our highest priority at that moment.

When our needs are not being met – when our cups are being emptied – we need the 'skill to fill' them.

With children, rather than identifying their largest cup, we focus on which cup is currently empty (their Will to Fill™), and support them to develop the Skill to Fill™ that cup.



DISADVANTAGES OF REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS

When adults administer consequences, we are in control of children. Naturally, given that they are inherently aversive, punishments have some particular disadvantages:

- They can become addictive and escalate into abuse.
- They can teach children to ignore adults who threaten but do not deliver punishment.
- Children can be shunned by their peers as a result of adults' discipline of them.
- Punishment can intimidate onlookers.

SHARED FEATURES

- Both rewards and punishments entail punishment. Individuals will feel punished if they judge that they "deserve" some recognition but do not receive it. This shows that rewards and punishments are two sides of the same coin (*Kohn, 1999*).
- Both are attempts to manipulate children into doing things our way.
- Given that the need to be self-determining is fundamental to all human beings, external control will often excite secondary behavioural problems, such as resistance, rebellion and retaliation (*Gordon, 1970*). This is particularly likely for spirited children.
- Consequences focus children's minds on what they will earn by their behaviour, rather than on the effects of their actions on others.

LIMITED EFFECTIVENESS

- To have any effect on children's behaviour, rewards and punishments have to be delivered immediately, frequently and intensely (consistently). This is seldom possible.
- Conformist children will learn to comply but, in so doing, become submissive. In terms of their learning, they might avoid taking intellectual risks and being creative in case adults might disapprove of the outcome.
- When children are accustomed to adults judging their actions, they do not learn to monitor their own behaviour: they notice neither their accomplishments nor their thoughtless acts.
- Consequences work mainly for those who are cooperative anyway and therefore do not need manipulation; for the remainder, they seldom alter their disruptiveness and instead resist outside attempts to control them.
- Coercion damages relationships.

EFFECTS ON RECIPIENTS

- Children's intrinsic motivation for learning declines.
- Children can become competitive with each other as they try to earn for themselves the limited rewards that are on offer.
- The imposition of external controls can teach children to exercise control over peers (and adults) through verbal and physical aggression and bullying.
- Rewards and punishments can discourage children as they realise that they cannot achieve inflated expectations.

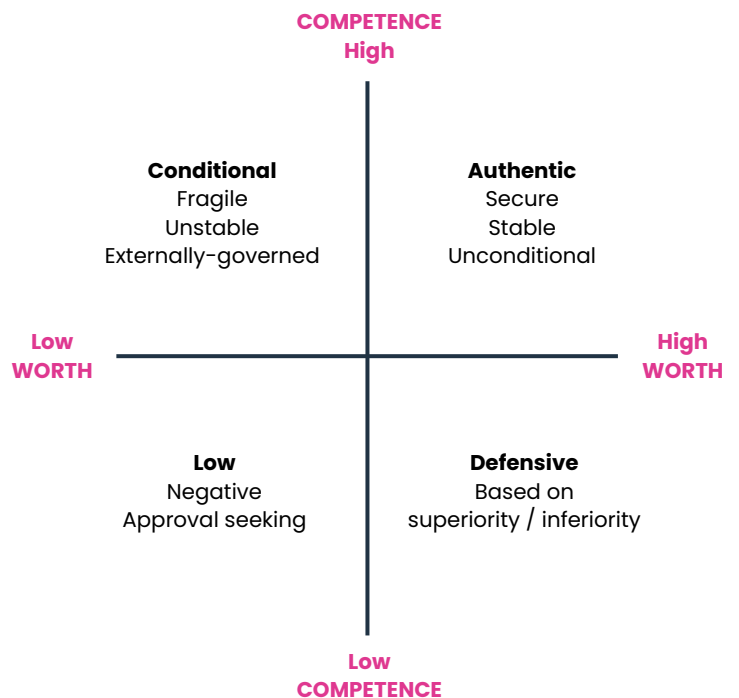
SELF-ESTEEM

Our self-esteem is how we feel about our qualities and achievements. It has two aspects:

- our **competence**, which is the extent to which we achieve at skills that matter to us (our ideals)
- our **worth**, which refers to how much we like, respect and accept ourselves.

Our esteem about our competence has to be earned (by becoming competent at some skills that we value); in contrast, our esteem about our worth has to be given. It is our birthright: it must have no pre-requisites.

TYPES OF SELF-ESTEEM



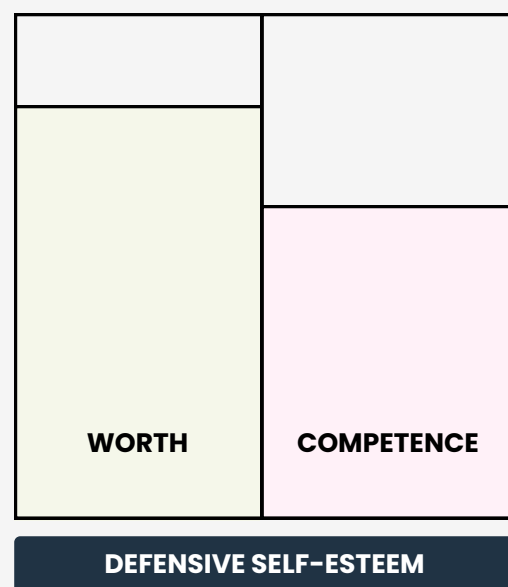
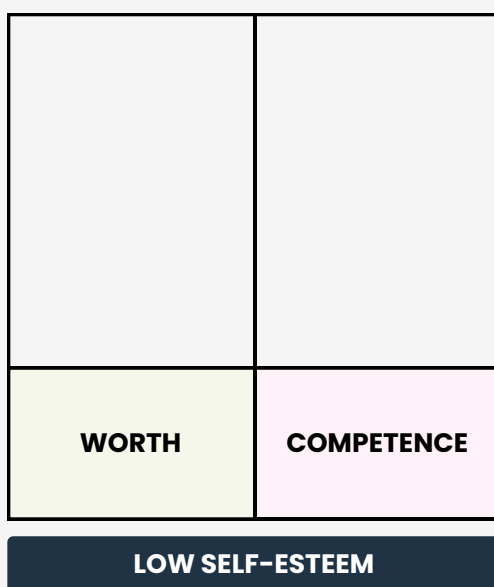
LOW SELF-ESTEEM

Individuals with low self-esteem are confused about both their competence and their worth. As you might expect, they are at risk for emotional problems, have poor health, are dissatisfied with their lives, are desperate to gain others' approval, and are sensitive to both rejection and failure.

DEFENSIVE SELF-ESTEEM

When children focus on just one element of their self-concept to the exclusion of others, they develop an inflated self-esteem because it notes the highs but overlooks the lows. This is common for children whose self-esteem is based on their possession of power. They see the world in terms of winners and losers; they value dominance and use power to attract the admiration of others.

These are the school bullies. A second group are intellectual snobs who believe that a difference in competence equates to a difference in worth; a third group is the elitists who believe they are superior because they are wealthier than others; and bigots who believe in their superiority on the grounds of their race, religion or gender.



CONDITIONAL SELF-ESTEEM

Individuals with this type of self-esteem doubt their worth and therefore strive to earn self-esteem through their accomplishments and by courting others' high opinions of them. This form of self-esteem requires constant validation. Necessarily, then, it is fragile or unstable because fortune is fickle: the next failure or rejection is just around the corner.

Emotionally, these individuals experience maladaptive feelings and poor coping when challenged. They are highly anxious, depressive and stressed, and experience shame or denial following failure, while bragging about their successes.

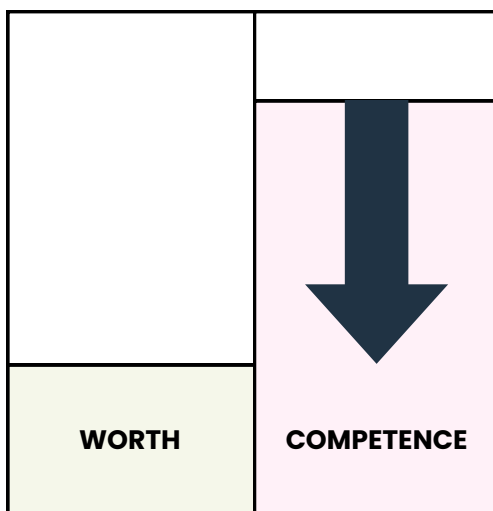
Academically, in an effort to prove their competence (which is the same thing, in their eyes, as proving their worth), the goal of children with an achievement-driven self-esteem is not to learn, but to rescue their self-belief.

AUTHENTIC SELF-ESTEEM

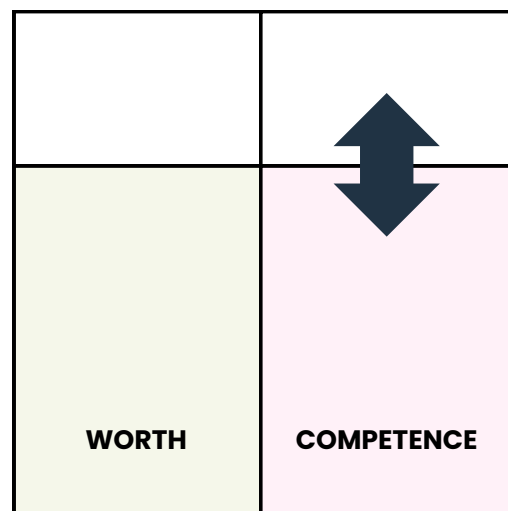
An authentic high self-esteem is secure and genuine. This is because it is balanced: it is made up of roughly equal proportions of worth and competence. As a result, these individuals' self-worth is well anchored, without the need for constant validation and without the compulsion to prove themselves by outdoing others.

They feel competent to take achievement risks and worthy enough to sustain a failure. This is because failure — even at skills that matter to them — will not imperil their overall self-esteem, because their sense of worth is not reliant on their achievements.

Accordingly, although there is some minor fluctuation in their esteem about their competence in response to successes or failures, on the whole they will use failure as a guide to future action rather than as a message about their worthiness.



CONDITIONAL SELF-ESTEEM



AUTHENTIC SELF-ESTEEM



PRAISE **VERSUS** ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

PRAISE

- Approves of children when they meet our expectations.
- Judges children or their efforts.
- Prescribes what children must do to earn our respect.
- Occurs in public, as a way to manipulate onlookers into copying a praised child

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

- Guides children to evaluate their own efforts.
- Gives our opinion (sparingly).
- Describes what children have done that we already respect.
- Is a personal event that does not show children up in public or compare them to each other.



BENEFITS OF ACKNOWLEDGMENT

- Gives children information about who they are and what they are capable of being: *it expands their self-concept.*
- Does not imply doubt about their worth or tie their worthiness to their ability to satisfy our expectations: *their ideals remain realistic.*
- Because it is authentic, it is credible, meaningful and, therefore, *successful at low doses.*
- Does not undermine children's *intrinsic motivation.*
- Encourages *self-referenced perfectionism*, rather than socially prescribed perfectionism.

TIPS FOR **ACKNOWLEDGING** CHILDREN'S ACHIEVEMENTS

Ask children how they feel about what they have achieved:

"Are you pleased?"

"What do you think of that?"

"Are you happy with that?"

When children are saying or giving nonverbal messages that they are pleased, reflect that:

"You look delighted!"

"You seem very proud of yourself."

"You look very pleased."

When appropriate, add your opinion (but not a judgment):

"Well, I agree with you!"

"I agree that you can be very pleased with yourself."

"I think it's special too."

Give information or feedback in the form of 'I'-verb:

"I admire..."

"I respect..."

"I value..."

"I'm impressed that..."

"I appreciate..."

Intend to congratulate, not manipulate:

"Congratulations!"

"Hey! You did it!"

"Wow! Look at that!"

Express appreciation:

"Thank you!"

"I'm grateful that..."

"I appreciate that because..."

Focus on the process, not the product:

"I admire that you tried something new."

"I'm impressed that you had another go."

"Looks like you really worked at that."

Verify children's own assessment that they have achieved something worthwhile, highlight their successes so that they notice these, and expand on what they have achieved:

"I agree that it's quite an achievement!"
(verification)

"Did you know you could do that?"
(highlight)

"And not only have you finished it, but you worked on it for ages."
(expansion)

**Use natural manners, without patronising children.
For example, in response to a child's thanks:**

"You're welcome!"

"It's a pleasure."

"I hope you enjoy it."

TRANSLATE THE FOLLOWING PRAISE INTO ACKNOWLEDGMENT:

That's great! Good work! Well done! That's terrific! _____

Good girl/boy for packing up. _____

Good on you for eating your veggies. You're going to grow up big and strong. _____

You're such a good child for listening to me. _____

You're so clever. _____

I'm proud of you. _____

You look pretty. _____

Good boy/girl for using your manners (when children
have thanked you for giving them something). _____

TARGETED INTERVENTIONS: EVERYDAY METHODS

Say what you see ... ask a question.

*Educators Toolkit for Behaviour –
Phoenix Support for Educators*

Ask

- “In what way did you hope (the behaviour) would work for you?”
- “What was happening when you (did that)?”
- “What do you need right now?”
- “What can I do to help?”
- “What is your problem with (doing as asked)?”
- (Later) “When you feel like you did this morning, what can we do to help you?”

Explain the effects of the behaviour

- Give children every opportunity to save face when they have made a mistake.
- In non-judgmental terms, give information about the effect of their actions on others.

Wait

When children know what they need to be doing, they don't need a lecture explaining this yet again. They just need time to marshall their own reasons.

- “I understand that you don't want to ...”
- “That's okay. I can wait until you're ready.”

Offer children choices

- About their learning goals
- About routines and activities
- Whether to do something (that is optional)
- How to do something (that is compulsory)

Empathic Assertion

- Empathise with the child's needs: "I understand that you..."
- Express your own needs assertively: "However, I need..."
- Solve the problem jointly: "So what can we do about that?"

Collaborative problem solving

- S** State the problem.
- O** Generate options for solving it.
- I** Identify their likely outcomes.
- V** Select the very best option.
- E** Enact (do) it.
- D** Do it again if the solution fails.

PROBLEM SOLVING BETWEEN CHILDREN

Discover what the conflict is about by asking (in an enquiring or curious tone):
'What's going on?'

Restate the problem: "I see your problem..."

Guide the children to find their own solution: 'What can you do?'.
(Suggest solutions if the children are too young to generate their own.)

Guide the children to choose a solution that satisfies them both.

Invite them to seek further help if needed.

GUIDANCE PRINCIPLES

SIGNS THAT CHILDREN ARE OVERWHELMED: MELTDOWNS

PROTESTS:

thrashing about, screaming, crying, spitting.

WHINGEING/WHINING:

the passive version of a protest, involving sulking, nagging and complaining.

HELPLESSNESS:

the frustrated meltdown when children have failed at something and are giving up, perhaps throwing items around the room, declaring that they, the task or their teachers are 'stupid' or that they will never be able to do it.

SOCIAL MELTDOWN:

- *Reactive aggression*: bossing others, refusing to share or take turns, name-calling, aggression, bullying, exclusion out of anger in response to a perceived trespass (out of control of feelings, particularly anger)
- *Proactive aggression*: enacting an impulse to hurt someone because they *can* (out of control of impulses)

UNCOOPERATIVENESS:

not being able to overcome their distaste for a reasonable directive.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN **CHILDREN'S** AND **ADULT'S** EMOTIONS

Children's feelings are more intense than adults.

They have a limited vocabulary for explaining to themselves what they are feeling.

They are serial emoters. This means that their feelings are undiluted and therefore can seem more dreadful.

They lack experience at resolving emotion.

We can panic and become frightened when our feelings overwhelm us.

Humans are the only species that experiences feelings about our feelings.



SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S SELF-REGULATION

On the reasoning that:

- Children who are acting thoughtlessly typically know how they should be behaving
- But they temporarily cannot act that way because they have lost self-control

Your task becomes not teaching them facts that they already know, but helping them to get back in command of themselves.

Time In

Bring children in close
— physically or
emotionally

Time away (sanctuary)

Co-design with the
children a chill-out
space where they can
self-soothe

Give up (using coercion)

FURTHER READING

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WEBSITES

- [Louise Porter](#)
- [Alfie Kohn](#)
- [Nonviolent Communication](#)
- [Ross Greene](#)
- [Phoenix Support for Educators](#)
- [The Phoenix Cups](#)

