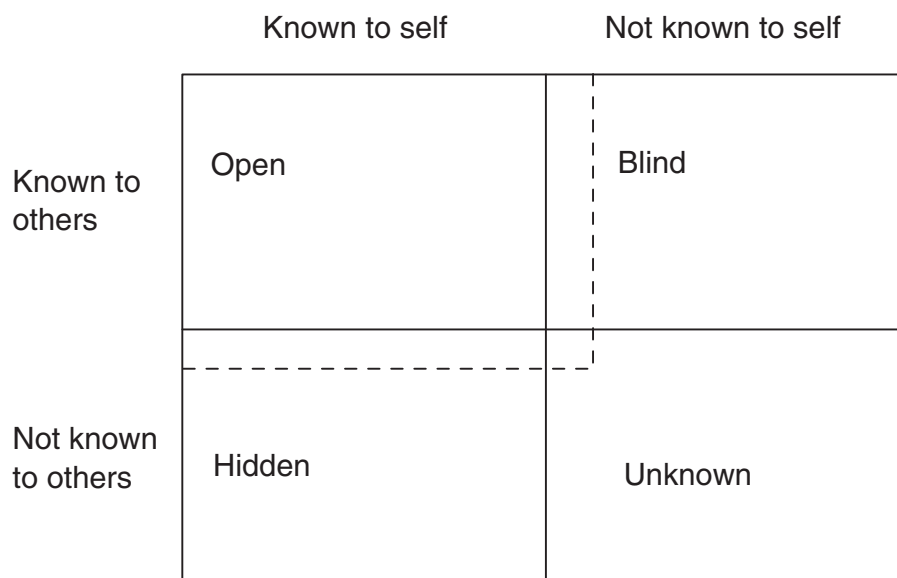


2

Your Self-Esteem

Your awareness of it and some steps towards nourishing it and enhancing it



Please look at this diagram (supposedly devised by two friends called Joseph Luft and Harry Ingram, (1995) The Johari Window).

- Self-disclosure opens the hidden area
 - Feedback opens the blind area
 - Experiment and play open the unknown area
- 1 Take time to list some circumstances and situations where you have opened your window, however slightly.
 - 2 Self-esteem is based on openness and trust. Where have you been and who have you been with when you have:
 - Disclosed things to others which weren't known before?
 - Had information from others about how your behaviour appears to them?
 - Discovered something new about yourself?
 - What amount of risk do you think you took?
 - Was there more trust between you and the others afterwards?
 - Did your feelings towards yourself change in any way?
 - 3 Discuss the answers with a friend.

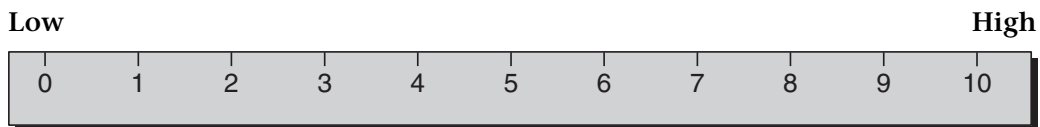
Circle Time helps everyone to open their windows and to set their sights on new horizons.

Ever since I was born I have always seen myself as a lesser self.

Ivor Cutler, 1923–2006, Scottish poet, singer,
songwriter and storyteller

Ivor Cutler displayed his genius in his writings and appearances on radio, television and the stage over many years. Anyone who saw his retirement performance at the London Festival Hall would realise what a highly respected and much loved man he was. Yet at some stage he had revealed his true feelings about himself which showed he had been unable to cope with the key issue in his life. There are many others who appear extremely successful in their lives, who are well known and whose talents are acclaimed by all, but who choose to end their lives prematurely because of their opinion of themselves. Suicide is a national problem; it is the second highest cause of death among 16–25-year-old men.

Self-esteem



Your own self-esteem. On a continuum of zero to ten where would you put your self-esteem at the moment?

What does self-esteem do for you? How much do you have?

You should know that it is not a constant. It moves up and down a continuum according to the situation you are in and the position on it is dependent on your previous experiences. If, in life, you have had many positive experiences that enabled you to grow and build those qualities that encompass your self-esteem, then wherever you find yourself you will be more able to cope. If it is a challenging situation you will be able to draw on your self-esteem reserves. If negative experiences have left you with little or no reserves it would be much more difficult to deal with. If times are good you can bank some personal savings and have them to draw on if circumstances change. If you have no savings, then that is when problems arise. Many children today never leave the beginning of the self-esteem continuum. They grow up in circumstances where all they can do is just cling on to the end with their finger nails. These are the ones who, in order to survive, turn to alcohol, drugs, crime, and the other behaviour problems society is faced with. Parents with low self-esteem have little to give to their children and the downward spiral continues.

Awareness is the first step to change

Having a healthy level of self-esteem is a crucial investment in everyone's life. Awareness of behaviours and feelings is the first indication we have to discover how much self-esteem we possess. If you have not given a thought to your self-esteem before and how it is or is not sustaining you, here are some simple activities which you can do to test that awareness and to use as a guide to show what can be done to build and enhance your self-esteem.

Exercise A

Keep a journal for at least a week, making daily entries recording your experiences and using these statements. At the end of the time, note any changes that have occurred in your awareness or behaviour.

Today

- I learned that I ...
- I realised that I ...
- I noticed that I ...
- I discovered that I ...
- I was surprised that I ...
- I was pleased that I ...
- I was displeased that I ...

Exercise B

Give compliments.

- 1 If you are a teacher, give a genuine, thoughtful compliment to a student who concerns you every day for two or three weeks. It doesn't matter how brief it is. Do not be put off by any initial adverse reaction.
- 2 If you work with adults, give a compliment daily to a colleague, especially one who appears to need some extra support.
- 3 Give compliments to all those at home, friends, shopkeepers, all you come in contact with.
- 4 Be aware of your feelings when you receive a compliment. A compliment is enhanced tremendously by touch – from the gentlest touch on the arm or shoulder to the warm embrace. If words can't express it, say it with hugs.

If somebody listens, or stretches out a hand, or whispers words of encouragement, or attempts to understand, extraordinary things begin to happen.

Loretta Girzartis

Try these today!

I'm glad you're here (in this class/in this school/in this group)

I like the way you ...

(Continued)

Discussions

Circle Time is an excellent forum for discussion. Discussions can benefit children in many ways. For example, children often have the mistaken belief that they alone experience the stresses of abuse, domestic violence, divorce, sibling rivalry, fear of failure, teasing, bullying, thinking themselves unattractive and so on. Discovering that they share the same longings, difficulties, conflicts and doubts enhances their self-esteem. Children will learn how to share and be comfortable with their feelings and this, in turn, may enable them to resist the problems of depression, drugs and alcohol. Instead of having sex education lessons in isolation, placing the subject into a talk and discussion in the middle of a Circle Time can result in positive benefits.

Discussions are most successful in small groups, later the class group is used for feedback and summing up. That way everyone will make an input even if they do not actually speak to the whole group. The way the small groups are formed is important. Allowing children to form their own is not a good idea except on certain occasions. Friends will always gravitate together and those without will suffer real anxiety. There will not be a healthy mix. Random groupings should be used. This can be done in many ways, for example, by asking the children to find others born in the same month, or who have the same initials or who are wearing different/the same colours. Three is the best psychological number for a group of this nature – a triad. Sometimes it is more appropriate to bring two triads together for feedback rather than immediately re-forming the big group. The use of these triads can be extended to activities other than those done in Circle Time, known as the Buddy System, it is a very powerful dynamic for encouraging a flourishing class atmosphere.

At the summing up stage with the whole group, it is good to record the conclusions in whatever way is most suitable. Posters put on display can be useful reminders where this is appropriate.

Circle Time is a good place for developing listening skills. Such skills are valuable in all relationships and, by and large, children do not get enough positive attention. Circle Time is a good opportunity for the shy and more isolated child to express himself, and be heard. When the child feels safe and concludes that judgements are not being made you will soon see he will be happy to join in and offer his two penny's worth. As respect and acceptance of each other grows in these discussions the skill of seeing the other's perspective increases and true empathy is present.

It is often not the most lovable individual who stands most in need of love, but the least lovable. Willed love often leads to liking.

Key to icons

These icons help to identify each activity with its source section. For repeated activities such as the Lighthouse and Plan for the day, a full description will be given in the first circle and an icon will be used thereafter.



Selection of child and the making of the Special Day



Round – a good way to start Circle Time



Discussions – thinking, participation, debates, involvement, making decisions



Game – raising energy/fun level



Activity – a little self-esteem



Group yell – a real energiser



Circle squeeze – quiet, warm beginnings



Physical contact in a variety of ways



Visualisation/guided imagery



The Lighthouse – an essential ending, closure



Plan for the day – moving on