

QUESTION: I was telling my mother about something I had done. I was feeling good about what I had accomplished when she interrupted me, "Stop bragging about yourself. Shame on you for blowing your own horn like this!" This is my question: Was I right, or was my mother right?

ANSWER: I do not wish to be in the middle of an issue between you and your mother. What I am happy to do is respond to the basic issue. The issue has to do with **the value one holds of one's self**. This is commonly referred to as 'self-esteem', 'self-worth', 'self-image' or 'self-concept'. Regardless of the word used, the essential point is what value, what worth, do we place on ourselves.

Most of us begin to develop our self-concept very early in life. How I cringe over the reactions in a store when an adult sees his/her little one reaching out to touch a can or a carton. These store items are attractive, and the natural instinct of the child is simply to reach out and touch. Sadly, the adult may slap the little one with a physical slap and/or an emotional slap, adding, "You're a bad boy!" or "You're a naughty girl!" Being put down early in life gets one started in life with a negative opinion about one's self. I wish adults would make a distinction between what a child does as "bad" while the person doing that thing is not "bad". Focus on the unacceptable behavior but not penalize the developing self-image. Differentiate between what a person does from that person's continuing inherent value. Negativity of self injected into us in any way may likely cause us to be seriously effected in a negative way all our lives.

Over many years of counseling, this idea has come to me. What do you think about it? **How an individual really feels and thinks about her/himself determines to**

***a very large extent how that person experiences life.*** If I feel crummy about myself, I will tend to act and react in negative ways, including having people around me who will support me in having a crummy life. If I feel good about myself, I will act and react in positive ways, and I will have people around me who will support me in making life exciting, rewarding, fulfilling. As I think and feel about myself, so my life will develop that way for me. Do you agree with this?

Two issues arise. One is if I start talking about myself, what will prevent me from becoming an obnoxious braggart? After all, as someone points out, a person who is wrapped up in her/himself makes a very small package. As with most of life, moderation is the key. A person who talks too much or too little about one's self raises a question in my mind as to how that person really feels about him/herself. Excessive talking may well be bragging that down deep reveals a poor self-image, an inferiority complex; too little talking about one's self also may reveal an equally poor self-image, a lack of caring for self.

Another related issue is this. There is the temptation when evaluating one's self to make a comparison with others. Here is what frequently happens. We compare ourselves with someone who far excels us in some way. Results? Of course, we conclude that we are inferior in some way, maybe in many ways, perhaps in all ways.

The attitude towards one's self is essential in the disciplines of Humanistic Psychology and of Self Psychology. Many religious systems attend to this, some in a helpful and healthy way, some in a not so helpful and healthy way. People who are Christians may refer to Jesus who said, "I came so that you may have life, and have life

abundantly.” Translated: “I came to confirm your self value. You are a precious child of God.”

A proportion of people who come to counseling reflect a low self image, lacking in self-esteem. Consequently, of course, their lives are often confused, traumatized, sometimes entangled in problems, almost devastated, a drag. Counseling assists them to place the correct and positive reality spin on how we accept ourselves (and in turn, others). Again, as our self-esteem increases, so happiness, fulfillment and contentment increase.

How can we help others if we have not taken good care of ourselves first? How can we guide others to prize themselves if we first don't prize ourselves? Do good unto one's self before you attempt to do good to others.

Here is a neat and accurate point someone makes. “God made me, and God don't make junk.” That is truth. You, and me, and everyone else are a valued, precious, unique and worthy individual. Claim that truth about you.

**Questions may be sent to the Samaritan Counseling Center, 1850 Colfax Ave., Benton Harbor, MI 49022, faxed to (269) 926-6780 or emailed to [pbambrick@samcounseling.org](mailto:pbambrick@samcounseling.org). Dr. Jim Remington, a therapist at the Center, answered today's question.**

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