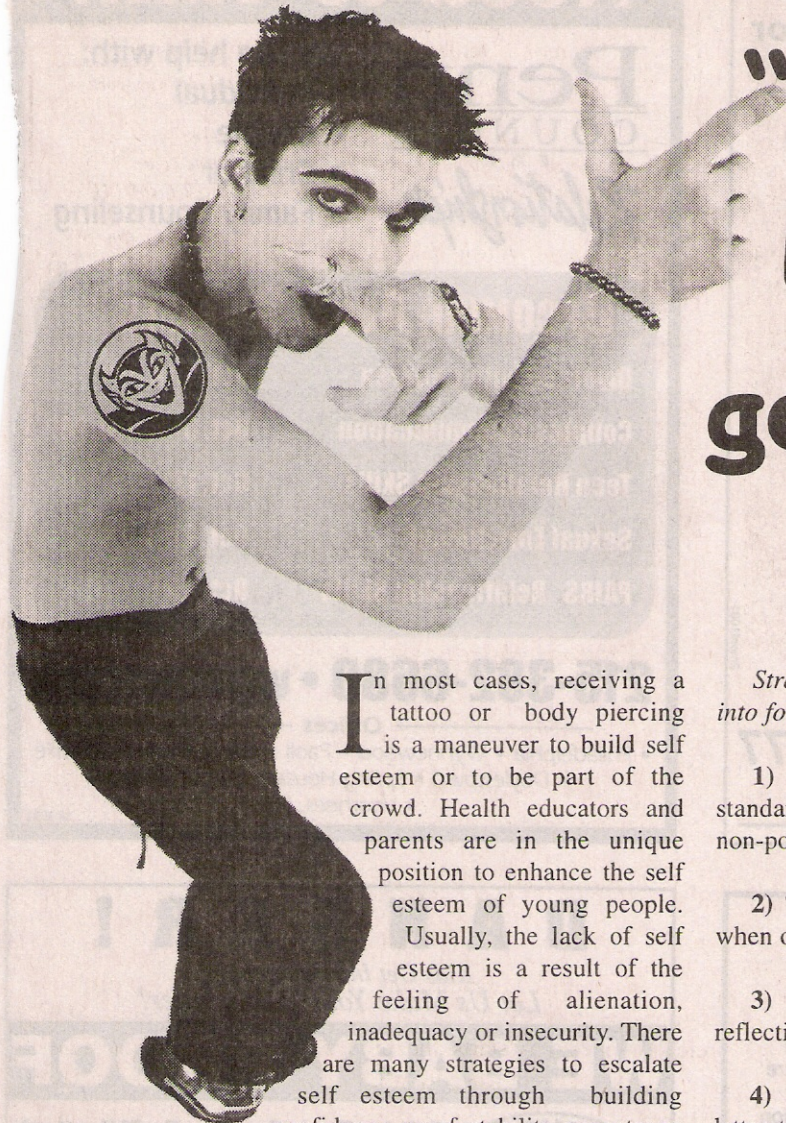


"By the way, Mom, I just got a tattoo."

by Dr. Morton Tener



In most cases, receiving a tattoo or body piercing is a maneuver to build self esteem or to be part of the crowd. Health educators and parents are in the unique position to enhance the self esteem of young people. Usually, the lack of self esteem is a result of the feeling of alienation, inadequacy or insecurity. There are many strategies to escalate self esteem through building confidence, comfortability, acceptance and support from home and school.

It is not enough just to talk with adolescents about greater view of self. Rather, the growth process requires dialogue leading to action, sharing positive and rewarding experiences. For example, in-school intramurals should be emphasized for those not in varsity sports. In the family environment, children should be encouraged to be part of scout groups, community services, etc. Also, recognition should be given not only for academic achievement, but for effort.

It is not enough to talk to an adolescent into feeling positive about self, but communication feedback should be developed, initiated by adolescents, in order to express their ideas, clarify their opinions, and to capitalize on their feedback.

Strategies in meeting these objectives could be segmented into four activities:

- 1) "Study of physical self" which examines cultural standards of beauty, own body image and the effect of non-positive factors in decreasing self esteem.
- 2) "Esteem input". This helps young people recall occasions when others' comments influenced their self esteem.
- 3) "Allow teens to receive support from others" while reflecting upon their own personal strengths.
- 4) (and most meaningful): "To have young people write a letter to themselves" that focuses on the following questions: What are the things you like about yourself that do not relate to your appearance? How does your feeling about physical appearance influence your self esteem? What positive and negative life experiences have influenced your self esteem? How can you use self-affirmation strategies in your every day life? What activities can you use to enhance the self esteem of others?

This lesson can be adapted to a variety of middle-grade and high school levels, however, the depth and scope of the discussion and impact will reflect the child's maturity level and ability to be receptive. Lessons on self esteem can be used in conjunction with current challenging social issues such as sexuality, substance abuse, eating disorders, violence and emotional health.

Dr. Morton Tener is in his 34th year at Glassboro State-Rowan University and his 45th year in New Jersey education. Prior to coming to Glassboro-Rowan University he was a teacher, basketball coach, guidance counselor and vice-principal in different school districts in South Jersey. Out of all the educational experiences, his greatest love is working with student teachers. He was also a former camp director for many years.