



**What are the signs
of low self-esteem? ▶**

To help determine if a child has low self-esteem, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends watching for the signals listed below. These signs could be everyday responses as the child relates to the world around him or her, or they might only occur occasionally in specific situations. When the behaviour becomes a repeated pattern, parents and coaches may need to become sensitive to the existence of a problem.

Low self-esteem may be the cause when a child

- avoids a task or challenge without even trying, or gives up at the first sign of frustration. This often signals a fear of failure or a sense of helplessness
- cheats or lies to prevent losing a game or doing poorly
- shows signs of regression, acting babylike, or very silly. These types of behaviour invite teasing and name-calling from other youngsters, adding insult to injury
- becomes controlling, bossy, or inflexible to hide feelings of inadequacy, frustration, or powerlessness
- makes excuses (“The teacher is dumb”) or downplays the importance of events (“I don’t really like that game anyway”), using rationalizing to place blame on others or on external forces
- withdraws socially, losing or having less contact with friends, as school grades decline
- experiences changing moods, exhibiting sadness, crying, angry outbursts, frustration, or quietness
- makes self-critical comments, such as, “I never do anything right.” “Nobody likes me.” “I’m ugly.” “It’s my fault.” “Everyone is smarter than I am.”
- has difficulty accepting either praise or criticism
- becomes overly concerned or sensitive about other people’s opinions
- seems strongly affected by negative peer influence, adopting attitudes and behaviours like a disdain for school, cutting classes, acting disrespectfully, shoplifting, or experimenting with tobacco, alcohol, or drugs
- is either overly helpful or never helpful at home.

Modified from American Academy of Pediatrics *Caring for Your School-Age Child: Ages 5 to 12*. Used with permission.