



Teacher Activity

Sense of Self

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- create self-portraits based on how they see themselves and how they believe they are viewed, and analyze the differences;
- assess their self-confidence and consider its effects on their lives;
- develop examples of positive self-talk to replace negative self-talk in situations related to decision-making.

Overview

In this activity, students will investigate their self-esteem and consider the factors that impact it. Students will begin by drawing a self-portrait that illustrates both how they believe others see them and how they see themselves. After considering the differences and similarities between the two sides of their portrait, they will reflect on why these differences exist. They will then be introduced to the connection between self-perception and self-confidence, and students will discuss the effects of self-confidence on their lives—including their ability to make decisions. The activity will wrap up with an activity centered around self-talk. Students will work in pairs to brainstorm examples of negative and positive self-talk for specific situations, followed by working independently to develop positive self-talk statements that could help boost their confidence and support healthy decision-making in situations involving their peers.

Grade Range

5–8

Timing

45–60 minutes

Materials Needed

- Self-Portrait handout, one per student
- Shifting Negative Self-Talk: Partner Work handout, one per student
- Shifting Negative Self-Talk: Independent Work handout, one per student

Procedure

1. Warm-Up Activity

- Begin by passing out one Self-Portrait handout to each student.
- Read the handout's directions aloud and be sure students understand that their portrait should be divided in half, with one side reflecting how they see themselves and the other side



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reflecting how they believe others see them. Encourage students to draw a full-body portrait, as this will give them more opportunity to include personal details.

2. Once about ten minutes have passed, guide the class in a discussion around their self-portraits. While they don't need to share their portraits with their peers if they feel uncomfortable doing so, encourage them to discuss the following questions:
 - What are the similarities between the two sides of your portrait?
 - What are the differences between the two sides of your portrait?
 - Why do you think these differences exist?
 - How did drawing a portrait with these two sides make you feel?
3. Introduce the concept of self-perception. Explain:
 - How we perceive ourselves is determined by the image we hold of ourselves plus what we think about this image.
 - Our self-perception is heavily affected by our self-confidence. Self-confidence is your belief in yourself that you can do well and succeed. Self-confidence helps you tackle challenges and feel worthwhile.
4. Instruct students to close their eyes or look down at their desks. Then challenge them to rate their self-confidence on a scale of 1–10, with 10 being the highest. Help them determine a rating by sharing guiding questions, such as:
 - Do you like to try new things? If yes, this is a sign of being confident.
 - Do you generally think well or highly of yourself? If yes, this is a sign of being confident.
 - Are you usually okay being yourself? If yes, this is a sign of being confident.
5. Then lead students in a snowball-style discussion to get them thinking about the effects of self-confidence on their lives. To do this:
 - First: Ask each student to turn to a partner and discuss: How do you think self-confidence affects your life? In what situations do you feel more or less confident?
 - Second: Instruct pairs to partner with another pair and discuss as a group of four: Can you think of a time when self-confidence helped (or could have helped) you overcome a challenge?
 - Third: Bring the whole class together as a group and discuss:
 - How may self-confidence affect someone's ability to stand up to peer pressure?
 - How may self-confidence affect someone's ability to make positive and healthy decisions?
6. Tell the class that everyone struggles with self-confidence sometimes. When people do, they tend to have negative thoughts about themselves, which can also be called *negative self-talk*. For instance: If someone came in fifth place in a race, their negative self-talk might sound like: "I knew I wouldn't come in first place" or "I'll never have friends if I say no to something they want to do."
7. Explain that one way to improve your self-confidence is to make an effort to turn your negative self-talk into positive self-talk. Challenge the class to put themselves into the shoes of someone who just came in fifth place in a race, and ask them to brainstorm potential positive self-talk statements. Accept all ideas that talk about the person in a positive way!



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Tip: It may be helpful to introduce a simple way to turn most negative self-talk statements around: Using the word “yet.” Phrases like “I can’t do this” or “I don’t know how to…” can all be made more positive simply by adding the word “yet” to the end!

8. Pass out the Shifting Negative Self Talk handout (two sheets) to each student. Review the directions on both pages, and reiterate that the first page is for students to complete with a partner while the second page is for students to complete individually. Then instruct students to find a partner and begin the partner work, before completing the second page by themselves.
9. Wrap-Up:
 - End the session by encouraging students to place the individual page of the handout in a location where they can refer back to it privately in moments when they need extra confidence to make the right decision.
 - Then conclude by leading students in a discussion around the question: How may making an effort to shift to positive self-talk affect your ability to make safe and healthy decisions?

Extensions

Check out these resources to help students further investigate the concepts of peer pressure and the importance of saying no:

- Classroom Activity: [Informed Students Make Better, Healthier Decisions](#)
- Classroom Activity: [Refusal Roleplay](#)

National School Standards

[CASEL SEL Framework](#)

- Responsible decision-making: The abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations.
- Self-management: The abilities to manage one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations.

[National Health Education Standards](#)

- Standard 2: Students will analyze the influence of family, peers, culture, media, technology.
- Standard 4: Students will demonstrate the ability to use interpersonal communication skills to enhance health and avoid or reduce health risks.

[Common Core ELA Standards](#)

- SL.1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Directions: Draw a self-portrait in the space below. The left half of your portrait should explain how you view yourself, and the right half of your self-portrait should explain how you believe others (such as your peers, parents, teachers, etc.) see you. Include words and descriptors around your portrait for any thoughts that are too difficult to draw!

How I see myself

How I think others see me

Directions: Read the situation. Then fill in the speech bubbles with examples of negative self-talk, as well as positive self-talk that could replace it.

Situation

You forgot to study for your science quiz and you're debating looking at your classmate's answers.

Negative self-talk may sound like:

Positive self-talk could sound like:

Situation

You don't know anyone on your basketball team.

Negative self-talk may sound like:

Positive self-talk could sound like:

Situation

Your friends are asking you to do something you know you shouldn't, like trying an alcoholic drink when your parents aren't home.

Negative self-talk may sound like:

Positive self-talk could sound like:

Situation

(you choose!): _____

Negative self-talk may sound like:

Positive self-talk could sound like:

Shifting Negative Self Talk: Individual Work

Directions: Think about the areas in which you suffer from low self-esteem or the situations in which you tend to participate in negative self-talk. Form those negative self-talk sayings in your mind, and then write down the positive self-talk statement that you could use to counter the negativity. Fill the speech bubbles below with positive self-talk sayings about yourself. (You won't have to share this sheet with anyone else!)

