



***Hey,
Thompson!***

A Manual for Mentors of Adolescents

**Developing self-esteem and resilience in
secondary school students**

By Lou Thompson

Dedication: To John Franklin – the support never wavered.

How To Use This Book

This book has been written for mentors who are working to develop the self-esteem and resilience of a secondary school student. The author believes that all secondary school students will benefit from spending time in addressing self-esteem and resilience development needs. This is a very difficult task for a student to undertake alone. It is understood that it is not always possible for mentors to be found for secondary school students so teachers or parents can also introduce the activities and recommendations included in this book to the student.

It will be noted that the first person (e.g. “you”) is used in association with many of the activities and tables of explanation. This is done so that once the activity has been introduced to the student by a mentor, parent or teacher, the student can work on their own through the activity and, on conclusion, discuss outcomes with the mentor. The more “personal” the students consider the activities to be, the more meaningful the disclosure they will share.

To get optimum results from this book the following steps are recommended:

- The mentor should read through the Introduction to get a feel for the general focus of the book.
- Mentors should read through the information in Chapter 1 and enter into a general discussion about self-esteem with the student.
- The Thompson Self-Esteem Model should be discussed with the student.
- Students should be given the first two case studies to read in their own time.
- The students should then be encouraged to complete the **Student Performance Profiler**. Outcomes of this will highlight the chapters, activities and considerations that will be of immediate value to the student.
- After students have completed their **Student Performance Profile** they should be given the specific activities and case studies to work through quietly in their own time. It is important that the mentor ensures that the student understands the context in which the activity falls and the purpose of the activity.

Hey, Thompson! – A Manual for Mentors of Adolescents
Developing self-esteem and resilience in secondary school students.

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Foreword

This book has been written for any individual who is considering undertaking a mentoring role with a secondary school student.

There is a danger that unless a number of organisational and implementation principles and requirements are recognised, this most valuable process will not achieve its potential – indeed in some cases it can cause more problems than it solves. In this book the author will draw from his extensive mentoring experience to provide suggestions and strategies that the reader can use to determine the status of their mentoring strategies and develop them to acceptable levels. He will also provide organisational guidelines that need to be followed if an accountable and productive mentoring programme is to be implemented.

In examining aspects of the implementation of such a programme, it may be useful to firstly consider a case study which illustrates the importance of developing self-esteem and resilience in students and how a failure to do so may have tragic consequences.

Case Study: Franklin

This story reveals the tragedy of unhealthy self-esteem and low resilience.

Franklin brought to Avonvale Secondary School a reputation fitting that of a juvenile delinquent from Longmore Juvenile Detention Centre. He'd been suspended from primary school more times than any student who had ever enrolled into Avonvale Secondary School. He had a lengthy record of shoplifting, he'd physically assaulted one of his primary teachers and through his reputation as a "fighter" he kept his peers in a constant state of fear. It was an automatic decision that the authorities came to in designating Franklin to join my class for the "academically slow and behaviourally difficult" students.

Seated at the back of the room, empty desks either side of him, Franklin introduced himself to me on day one of his secondary schooling by standing, staring me straight in the eye and saying:

"My name is Franklin. I hate school. I've never had a teacher I liked and I don't like the look of you Thompson!"

"Thompson! I can't read – I won't read in class, so don't ask me to read in class."

"Thompson! I can't do maths – I won't do maths, so don't ask me to do maths."

"Thompson! I can't write, I won't write, so don't ask me to write."

Just as I was recovering from this tirade, Franklin recommenced his "state of affairs" address.

"Hey, Thompson! What's the story in this school about smoking?"

"Well Franklin, if you get caught smoking at this school you are automatically suspended," I replied.

"That could be a problem Thompson. I've been smoking since I was seven and I need a packet of Rothmans a day to see me through."

Franklin continued:

"Hey, Thompson!"

My God, I thought, what now? Is this ever going to stop?

"Hey, Thompson, what's that old shed outside the window used for?"

"Well Franklin, that's an old storeroom that no one uses any longer."

"I'll tell you what I'll do for you, Thompson. When I need a smoke, I'm going out to that storeroom. Don't ask me what I'll be doing because I'll tell you that now – I'll be having a fag."

Introduction

Introductory Comments

As we make our way into the new millennium there is significant evidence of widespread concern about the current social and economic pressures that permeate all sectors of developed western society. These pressures are taking a toll on the quality of lifestyles of ever increasing numbers of people. For those in work, organisational downsizing and restructuring, a decrease in work as a lifetime career and an associated devaluing of job security and loyalty to an employing organisation instigate pressures and stresses. The impact can be detected in statistics available related to the burgeoning numbers of adults seeking stress management courses, mental health programmes and psychotherapy treatments.

In catering for the pressures that confront youth and adults in the new millennium, in the main we continue to adopt a “programme” approach. This approach emphasises that the many pressures and issues confronting people will be addressed by the implementation of psychotherapy programmes, professional development programmes, enrichment programmes, adventure programmes, challenge programmes, extension programmes, remedial programmes and so on. When the empirical data associated with the outcomes of such programmes are examined, the conclusion is that the enormous human endeavour and financial investment involved usually results in very small gains and successes.

In writing this book on mentoring I am acknowledging that the time is opportune to focus attention not on “programmes” as has traditionally been done, but to focus attention on “people” as the key source for making a difference. Naisbitt and Aburdene (1990) suggested that the most exciting breakthroughs of the 21st century will occur, not because of technology, but because of an expanding concept of what it means to be human. This book has been written to advance the role that mentoring has in this expanding concept of being human.

Many will have come across terms such as “the x-factor”, “mental-toughness”, “perseverance” and “attitude” when learning about heroes and role models. Very few people deny that these conditions are vital for people to actualise or realise the top 10% of their performance potential and are the factors that underpin displays of excellence. These factors are also essential for secondary school students if they are to actualise the top 10% of their learning potential and achieve outcomes of excellence. In this book we will consider these factors, referring to them as self-esteem and resilience status.

Definitions

Self-esteem is related to the current “state of mind” a student has. It includes self-belief and the sense of having a focus or direction in life. It includes the goals and expectations that the student has.

Resilience status is a measure of mental toughness. Resilience status is a reflection of the current state of self-esteem. It includes the level of confidence a student has in his or her ability to achieve their goals, despite setbacks. It also includes their ability to persevere and their ability to cope with crises.

The healthier the self-esteem, the greater the level of resilience and the greater the likelihood that the student will actualise their learning potential and, in turn, come closer to achieving outcomes of excellence.

Drawing on the ideas of a number of writers and researchers I have concluded that:

A **mentor** is a person who is able to project unconditional, positive acceptance of another person. The kind of acceptance and approval projected by the mentor is not contingent upon the person having to meet the mentor’s expectations of what he or she should be. It simply depends on the person being alive.

What Does Having a Healthy Self-esteem and Strong Resilience Mean for a Student?

It has been found that students who have a healthy self-esteem and strong resilience:

- React calmly and constructively to mistakes, errors and disappointments;
- Overcome setbacks and adversities;
- Display confidence in their interpersonal relationships – their ability to make friends and maintain friendships;
- Have greater belief in their ability to achieve their goals;
- Persevere at striving for their goals in both the good and the bad times;
- Set themselves realistic goals;
- Are prepared to step outside their performance “comfort zone”;
- Cope with negative feedback;
- Are prepared to take “acceptable risks”, i.e. engage in tasks they haven’t attempted before; tackle old tasks in novel ways; engage in tasks that there is a good chance they might fail at;
- Are more likely to actualise/use the top 10% of their performance potential;
- Are less likely to be inhibited in their performance by an underlying fear of failure;
- Respect their health and have a healthy body image;
- Are able to resolve conflicts positively;
- Are able to communicate their “real self” to others;
- Are able to communicate assertively.

The Role of a Mentor

Students may find that actualising their potential can, at times, be a lonely journey. At times they are likely to find themselves asking:

- Who can help me find my direction?
- Who is someone I can trust that I can share this with?
- Who do I know that can stand in my shoes and see things from my point of view?
- Who do I know that will really listen to me?
- Who will help me determine what my options are?
- Who do I know that accepts me unconditionally?

Whilst parents and teachers can fill the role in a number of the above situations they are not always available just when they are needed, and may sometimes be too close to the student to give objective advice.

I would like to suggest that if an effective student-mentor relationship can be established, then the challenge of students actualising their potential becomes a less lonely and less stressful journey. The most important role that a mentor can have for secondary school students is that of assisting them to identify the choices and options they have related to decisions they have to make. A mentor will assist a student to prioritise their options and turn these into meaningful goals. Related to this role is the role that a mentor can play in assisting a secondary school student to identify resources, agencies and strategies they might use in the pursuit of their performance goals. The trick is to make sure that students get a good mentor. In Chapter 2 of this book I discuss elements of being a good mentor and how the student-mentor relationship can most effectively help the student.

The Student Profiler

The self-esteem and resilience needs of secondary school students are diverse and unique to individual students. This book contains a large number of activities, surveys and checklists related to different aspects of self-esteem and resilience development. Students and their mentors should be selective in their use of this book. Some of the strategies, surveys, checklists and information are going to have higher priority than others.

Chapter 1

The Thompson Self-Esteem Model

Contents

- 1.1 Important Information Mentors and Students Need to Know Regarding Self-Esteem
- 1.2 The Thompson Self-Esteem Model Explained
- 1.3 The Key Processes Involved in Developing Self-Esteem
- 1.4 The Self-Esteem Wall
- 1.5 Unacceptable Risk-Taking Behaviours
- 1.6 Early Warning Indicators Associated With the Self-Esteem Wall
- 1.7 Early Warning Indicators Related to Self-Image
- 1.8 Early Warning Indicators Related to Ideal Image
- 1.9 Physical Self-Esteem

Case Study: Rachel's Battle With the Self-Esteem Wall

Outcomes

Readers will ...

- Become familiar with key characteristics of the phenomena of self-esteem;
- Become familiar with the concepts of self-image and ideal image;
- Recognise the key processes involved in the development of self-esteem;
- Understand the concept of the "self-esteem wall";
- Be familiar with early warning indicators related to unhealthy self-esteem.

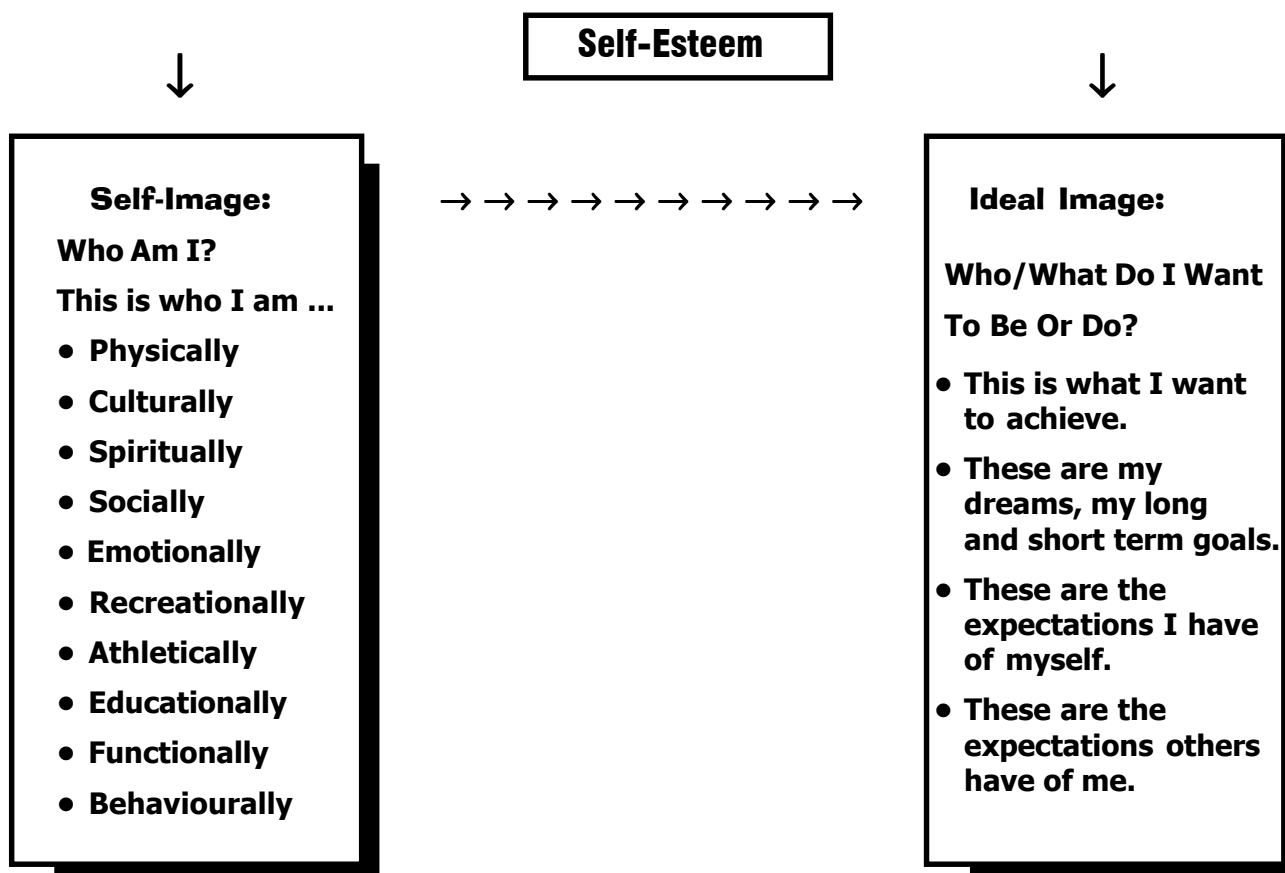
1.1: Important Information Mentors and Students Need to Know About Self-Esteem

A secondary school student’s self-esteem is a complex phenomenon. They are not born with their self-esteem in place. They begin acquiring it from their early childhood.

- Self-esteem can be described as a “state of mind” which is made up of the attitudes, feelings, thoughts, values and beliefs held by the student about their skills and capabilities.
- It is formed through information the student absorbs from the key figures and other figures in their life, and from the student’s own perception of their performance in comparison to others’.
- It can affect performance – good self-esteem enables good performance, as students feel confident trying new skills and reaching for their goals. Similarly, low self-esteem can prevent students from trying for goals in the belief that they are incapable of reaching them.
- It is a dynamic phenomenon in that it is forever changing. In most situations these changes are fairly small, ranging from small doubts about the ability to complete a task to a sense of well-being for having completed a task.
- However, occasionally events can occur that cause very significant changes to the state of a student’s self-esteem. This may lead to distorted views of their performance. Overnight they can plunge to a feeling of desperation or absolute failure, or at the other extreme to a feeling of elation or “being on top of the world”.
- The key to managing self-esteem and using it to assist a student to actualise their potential is to get as complete an understanding of it as possible. Only then can the early warning signs of unhealthy self-esteem be recognised, and action undertaken to improve self-esteem.

1.2: The Thompson Self-Esteem Model Explained

The Thompson Self-Esteem Model



As discussed earlier in this chapter, self-esteem is the belief the student holds about their capabilities and inherent value. It can be seen that it is made up of the self view of who the student is (their self-image) and what they are capable of (their ideal image).

Thompson argues that the stronger and more informed a student's self-image is, then the stronger and more realistic their ideal image is, and accordingly the stronger and more resilient their self-esteem is likely to be.

1.2.1 The Self-Image

This represents collected the thoughts, impressions and knowledge of who the individual is, as shown in the model on Page 14. It includes the thoughts and knowledge they have about their physical appearance, their spirituality, their emotionality, their culture, their social competence, their intellectual capacity and their general functionality (what they can or cannot do).

Self-image is dynamic. New experiences, normal body changes, changes in home, family or school circumstances, new friendships, ill-health or an accident often cause an individual to add something to their self-image, to modify their thoughts about their self-image or to suddenly have doubts and insecurities about it. Self-image continues to change and develop throughout life.

In the Thompson Self-Esteem Model self-image is the launch pad for self-esteem.

1.2.2 The Ideal Image

This represents the collected thoughts, ideas, knowledge and desires of who the individual wants to be and what they want to achieve in their life.

Ideal image incorporates the small daily short term goals individuals set themselves to the life dreams and aspirations they have.

Like self-image, ideal image is dynamic and ever changing. Past and new, successful and unsuccessful performance experiences, feedback from the "significant others" in life and changing family and social values and attitudes often cause students to change the goals and dreams that are part of their ideal image.

In the Thompson Self-Esteem Model Ideal Image is the target for self-esteem.

1.3: The Key Processes Involved In Developing Self-Esteem

If mentors are going to manage students' self-esteem and ensure that it allows them to actualise their performance potential, it is important for them to have an awareness and understanding of the key processes involved in self-esteem development.

Throughout students' lives many of the experiences, attitudes and awarenesses, and much of the knowledge that contributes to the building of self-esteem, result from self-discoveries. Every time students undertake a new adventure or challenge they gain new or extra information that they use to review their self-image and ideal image.

From these experiences they discover things they can do that previously they thought they couldn't. They also discover new likes and dislikes, new feelings, new attitudes, new values and new interests.

Each new adventure adds to the set of guidelines that students can use to evaluate who they are and what they want. The more self-discovery opportunities provided, the richer their self-esteem becomes.

From a very young age individuals have been receiving feedback from the significant others in their life. Often they used this feedback to add new thoughts, or change existing thoughts they have about their self-image. Frequently this feedback impacts on the performance expectations they set themselves, which are an integral part of the ideal image.

Studies have indicated that family members, teachers, friends, role models, employers, coaches and mentors are likely to represent students' significant others.

The influence of the feedback of these significant others will vary according to what aspect of the self-image or ideal image is under consideration, and the nature of the relationship they have with particular significant others.

1.4: The Self-Esteem Wall

Many students do not actualise their learning potential during their secondary school years because they have an unhealthy self-esteem.

For many students this unhealthy self-esteem takes the form of an internalised fear of failure that had its origins early in their primary schooling.

If students suffer from this fear of failure related to their school studies, it is probably the case that their family, teachers or friends are unaware that this is happening to them. It is likely that even the student themselves is unaware of just how negative an influence a fear of failure is having on learning performance.

Frequently this fear of failure is based upon a student having received some very hurtful feedback from a teacher, coach, family member or friend about a specific school performance that occurred in the past. Sometimes it happens because a student has a distorted or unrealistic evaluation of their past and current school learning performances.

For some students the fear of failure has its roots embedded in a damaged self-image. It could be that sometime during their secondary schooling, often in Year 10, they come to a conclusion something like the following description provided by Sonia, a Year 10 student:

I am different from my peers. I don't look the same. I don't think the same. I don't learn the same. I don't have the same values and beliefs. This is unacceptable. I don't think the 'real me' can match it with other students at school. It is inevitable that I won't live up to the expectations of my family and my teachers and I'll fail. I might as well not even try. (Sonia: Auckland: 2002)

A number of students have internalised this fear of failure because of an unhealthy ideal image, which is dominated by the unrealistic expectations of others, inappropriate goals of their own or an absence of any goals or dreams.

The following comments by Frank, a Year 12 student, reflect this situation:

I cannot meet the expectations others have of me. Too many people have put too many demands on my learning performance outcomes. The goals and dreams that are part of my ideal image are not my own but those of my family. These goals and dreams are meaningless to me; they're not mine; they're not what I really want to do or what I really want to be. (Frank: Turangi: 2002)

Somewhere in their final high school years this fear of failure – these uncertainties related to self-image or emptiness related to their ideal image – result in too many students reaching the following conclusions:

I'm not going to make it. I can't satisfy the performance expectations and dreams others have of me. I'm not good enough to reach the study goals people say I should have reached in Years 10 - 12. I'm going to fail, I'm useless. (Carol: Napier: 2002)

Too often when a student arrives at conclusions similar to those described above they slam into what can be termed a **self-esteem wall**.

I have used this term because it seems to best describe the state of self-esteem many secondary school students have related to me when the above circumstances are encountered. The self-esteem wall has been described by students as follows:

No matter how hard I try I can't get beyond this wall. Every time I step outside my comfort zone and attempt to break through this wall that's in front of the outcomes I have to achieve, I fail. I'll never make it. I'm not good enough; I don't think I have the necessary skills to reach my goals or satisfy the expectations of others. I might as well just go through the motions, do just enough to get by and, above all, avoid the embarrassment of failure.

(Group of Year 12 student mentors. Kelston Boys High School: Auckland: 2001)

Chapter 2

The Role of a Mentor

Contents

- 2.1 What Is a Mentor?
- 2.2 The Mentoring Relationship
- 2.3 The Role of a Mentor?
- 2.4 Organisational Considerations for Implementing a Mentoring Programme

Case Study: Charlie M - Mentor Extraordinary

Outcomes

Readers will ...

- Develop an understanding of the role of a mentor;
- Recognise the essential competencies a successful mentor should be able to demonstrate;
- Understand the unique features that characterise a successful mentoring relationship;
- Be familiar with key organisational requirements for a good mentoring relationship to occur.

Introduction

In the introduction to this book it was suggested that the challenge of actualising potential can be a very lonely journey for a student. Having access to a mentor can make the journey towards actualising potential more manageable, fun and exciting for the student. A parent, teacher or a close friend can be this mentor but only if, firstly, they are prepared to establish a relationship with the student which is quite unique and different from normal parent, teacher or friendship relationships, and secondly, that they are satisfied they have adequate mastery of the essential competencies required for successful mentoring. To be effective, a mentor needs to be able to do more than “care about” or “love” the student.

In viewing the role of a mentor and what makes a successful mentor, this chapter will investigate some of these competencies and how they can be successfully applied.

2.1: What is a Mentor?

The term “mentoring” first appears in Greek mythology when Ulysses left his son, Telemachus, under the tutelage of his old friend Mentor. (Carter & Lewis, 1994) For a considerable time mentoring was a term associated with vocational training.

Mentoring is a relationship where a trusted adviser provides a less skilled or less experienced person with such things as career advice, encouragement, and help in developing specific competencies. (Institute of Chartered Accountants, N.Z. Mentor Scheme, 1997)

Whilst there are many definitions, the key characteristic that most writers agree on is that mentoring is based around a special kind of relationship. (Cohen, 1995; Bennetts, 1999) Consideration of what has been written about the mentoring relationship has led me to the following definition of a mentor of secondary school students:

“ A mentor is a person who is able to project unconditional positive acceptance of an individual. The kind of acceptance and approval projected by the mentor is not contingent upon the student having to meet the mentor’s expectations of what they want the student to be or do. This kind of acceptance simply depends on the student being present. ” (Thompson, 2001)

2.2: The Mentoring Relationship

The key concept inherent in the above definition of a mentor is that of “unconditional positive acceptance of an individual”. This is not an easy condition to establish and is one that is normally not part of a parenting or teaching relationship. As a father, I often find it very difficult to display unconditional acceptance to my children. Consider this typical statement:

“I don’t care if you think that I’m being unfair son. I do not give you permission to smoke cigarettes.”

This is a requirement, a rule, a non-negotiable condition if you like – there is no room for discussion, there are no choices or options related to this decision. Just because I’ve imposed this condition doesn’t mean I’m a bad father – rather I am carrying out what I think is one of my parenting roles, setting and consistently modelling standards and values for my children.

Displaying unconditional acceptance requires some very special skills from a mentor. There are three fundamental skills mentors require if they are to establish effective mentoring relationships with secondary school students. These are:

2.2.1 Displaying respect

This involves the mentor displaying behaviours that convey to the student the message that they are worthwhile, unique and valuable. In simple terms this means helping the student to feel important and helping them realise that they are a valued person. At the centre of this requirement is the acknowledgement and respect of the inherent uniqueness of character that each person has. A mentor can display respect of the student through any of the following behaviours:

- Giving the student appropriate positive attention;
- Actively and accurately listening to the student;
- Showing the student that you have heard what they communicated;
- Giving the student “exclusivity time”, i.e. time shared exclusively between you and the student when you are concentrating only on the presence of him or her;
- Introducing yourself to the student in a positive, friendly manner;
- Showing the student basic courtesies – offering them a chair, offering them a coffee, not interrupting them when they are communicating something to you;
- Asking the student non-threatening and interesting questions;
- Not making snap judgements or evaluations of the student.

Chapter 3

The Student Performance Profiler

Contents

- 3.1** Introducing the Student Performance Profiler
- 3.2** The Composition of the Student Performance Profiler
- 3.3** Interpreting and Using the Rating Outcomes of the Student Performance Profiler
- 3.4** The Student Performance Profiler
- 3.5** Scoring Key for the Student Performance Profiler
- 3.6** Template For Collating and Recording Student Performance Profile Outcomes
- 3.7** Student Performance Profiler Outcomes: Menu of Explanations
- 3.8** Student Performance Profiler Outcomes: Menu of Strategies

Case Study: Ken

Outcomes

Readers will ...

- Be familiar with the purpose of the Student Performance Profiler;
- Be familiar with the composition of the Student Performance Profiler;
- Be familiar with the administration requirements of the Student Performance Profiler;
- Be able to score, record and interpret responses to the Student Performance Profiler;
- Be familiar with, and be able to apply the menus of explanations and strategies associated with the Student Performance Profiler.

3.1: Introducing the Student Performance Profiler

A major question facing a mentor and the student who together are going to embark on a journey of developing self-esteem and resilience is:

“Where do we begin?”

A great deal of time can be wasted if the mentor and student systematically work through every activity and, every survey from start to finish in this book. The idea is for the student and their mentor to identify key need areas, prioritise these and identify the relevant sections of the book that will assist with addressing these needs. The **Student Performance Profiler** in this chapter has been provided to enable students and their mentor to carry out this process.

The profiler has been designed to allow students to review important areas related to their self-esteem and resilience. It allows them to identify current strengths and weaknesses related to these concepts. This in turn, ensures they are more informed when they come to setting goals that they can pursue that will enable them to actualise their performance potential. The profiler will provide the mentor with a framework within which they can work alongside the student in this endeavour.

3.2: The Composition of the Student Performance Profiler

The **Student Performance Profiler** requires students to rate themselves in six domains, each of which is divided into four sub-categories. The first four domains contain items related to self-image whilst the final two domains contain items related to ideal image and resilience. The domains are as follows:

Domain A: Learning Abilities

Students’ ratings in this domain reflect their current judgements, attitudes and thoughts related to their school performance and ability to learn. In this domain the ratings are recorded according to the following sub-categories:

1. Awareness of learning strengths and weaknesses:

Are students familiar with these? Are they succeeding at school?

Are they aware of their learning characteristics?

2. Ability to set realistic learning goals:

Do students study just to please the family? Do they know how to set realistic learning goals?

Do they know the difference between short term, medium term and long term learning goals?

Are they able to monitor the progress they are making towards their learning goals?

Do they build the idea of “personal-best” into the learning goals they set themselves?

3. Strength of study skills:

Do students know what study skills are essential for them to be able to reach their learning potential?

Which study skills do students need to improve? How well do they manage their study time?

4. Attitude towards learning:

How much does the student care about his/her ability to learn?

Is the value the student attaches to learning negatively influenced by his/her peers’ attitudes?

Is the student able to show commitment and/or desire towards achieving learning goals?

Is the student’s attitude towards learning dominated by a fear of failure?

Domain B: Ability to Socialise

Students’ ratings in this domain reflect their current judgements, attitudes and thoughts related to their ability to interact with other people, establish friendships and feel comfortable when they are with people. In this domain ratings are recorded according to the following sub-categories:

1. The ability to form friendships:

Does the student have lots of friends and make new friends easily?

Does he or she have close friends?

2. The ability to interact with others:

Does the student find it easy to talk to parents? Is he/she comfortable at family gatherings?

Can the student introduce him or herself to other people? Is he/she shy when with a group?