



# Family Matters

## *Making Family Life Easier*

### Girls Today

These are challenging times for girls. They are coming of age in a more media-saturated and sexualised culture facing incredible pressures to be perfect and beautiful. The teenage years are a time of change and transition as girls try to figure out who they are and fit into a group they like. For girls to successfully navigate these years it's important that their self-esteem and relationships with other girls remain intact.

I believe this is especially important today as studies show us that self-esteem peaks at age 9 and then plummets, with 7 in 10 girls believing they are not good enough or do not measure up in some way. In the pre-teen & teen years self-esteem becomes closely connected to physical appearances as the body becomes a barometer of worth. With today's culture of perfectionism and images of impossible beauty, girls feel like they don't measure up to these standards, leaving them feeling bad about themselves.

With social acceptance becoming increasingly important during these years, this ideal image is often at the centre of the social hierarchy, with those who fit the image being seen as popular and accepted while those who don't are not. Not fitting in can be extremely painful for girls and many in an attempt to secure their position on the hierarchy will behave in ways that are cruel and mean to protect themselves.

When a girl has high self-esteem she believes in herself and recognises that she has a purpose. She is self-reliant, independent and resourceful. As a teenager she can contribute to her community by becoming a mentor and role-model of confidence and strength to other girls growing up and as an adult she uses the skills and resources she has developed to earn a salary, nurture a family and make her unique mark on the world. I believe that all girls have the capacity to be caring and kind towards each other and when they feel good about themselves they will engage in healthier behaviours towards each other.

As parents you can help build your daughter's self-esteem by:

- **Being a good role model** actions speak louder than words especially during the teenage years. If you want to boost your teenager's self-esteem, start with your own; Pay yourself some compliments on a job well done, accept yourself as you are and your children will learn by example how to carry themselves with dignity and pride
- **Compliments** Use the two-to-one rule. For every compliment you pay them about their appearance, give them two about their inner qualities and talents that make them unique.
- **Don't try to fix everything** help them to develop solutions to their own problems; this will give them belief in their own capabilities and a sense of 'I can'.
- **The power of words** the words we use with children become their inner voice. If we want to build their self-worth and esteem, we need to avoid behaviours such as criticism, shaming, blaming and use listening, respecting and encouraging in our communications with young people.