

CONFIDENCE

# THRIVING INDICATORS



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# Confidence

## Framing: What is Confidence, and how is it developed?

As an indicator of thriving, confidence is the perception that you can achieve desired goals through your actions, and that you have the skills or abilities to perform well in areas of life that you value.<sup>1</sup> Confidence is developed in youth when adults instill in them a sense of self-esteem, determination, and independent thinking.

Confidence is connected closely to the development of competence, or the ability to do something successfully or efficiently. When competency grows, an individual tends to grow in confidence, and similarly, confidence encourages effort to enhance and sustain competency. However, confidence is one's self-perception of competence, and self-perception is not always accurate, particularly among adolescents.

## Self-Perceived Confidence in Adolescence

Dr. Susan Harter, a developmental psychologist at University of Denver, has conducted research about teens' self-perceptions, which has resulted in a list of components that inform their sense of confidence. She discovered that confidence is expressed differently throughout adolescence, due to changes in maturity, roles, responsibilities and interests. The table below depicts the various components of adolescents' self-perceived competence within three distinct age categories.

Early: Ages 10 - 13	Middle: Ages 14 - 16	Late: Ages 17 - 20
Scholastic ability	Scholastic ability	Scholastic ability
Athletic ability	Athletic ability	Athletic ability
Physical appearance	Physical appearance	Physical appearance
Peer acceptance	Peer acceptance	Peer acceptance
Global self-worth	Global self-worth	Global self-worth
Behavior/conduct	Conduct/morality	Morality
	Close friendships	Close friendships
	Romantic relationships	Romantic relationships
	Job competence	Job competence
		Sense of humor
		Relationships with parents
		Intellectual ability
		Creativity

## Confidence is Connected to Values

Social scientists have learned that confidence is highly individual, varies in different situations, and can change significantly over time. For instance, a youth might feel confident in math class but not on the soccer field, or feel confident with adults, but not with peers of the opposite gender. In addition, confidence is clearly linked to age, such that an 11-year-old might not care about how well he mows the lawn because he's too young to value vocational competence, whereas a 16-year-old might care a great deal.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, individuals differ in what they want and expect to be good at, as well as in the qualities or skills they believe are essential to their positive self-regard.<sup>3</sup>

The great news is that confidence is like a muscle that develops with practice.

## Recommendations for Practice

- *Build self-esteem:* Tell youth daily that you care for them, and be specific about the qualities and behaviors you appreciate. Help youth recognize how they are unique and contribute positively to the world.<sup>4</sup> Be particularly sensitive to an adolescent's confidence during transition times, as self-esteem and grades often decrease during these times. To bolster a youth's confidence, talk about your own transition stresses and how you bounced back, so that youth don't feel alone in their experiences.<sup>5</sup>

*A study in 1989 demonstrates how youth can serve as their own role models. Students who were doing poorly in math class were videotaped solving math problems. Researchers compiled the few instances where each student solved a problem correctly, and then met with the student to explain that they were interested in how kids performed on math lessons. Each individual was told that the researchers wanted to speak with him or her because they knew that individual was a good math student. As expected, the student protested, at which point the researcher showed the*

*videotape, in which the youth saw himself/herself being successful in math.*

*After seeing themselves in a new light - being successful in math - these youth believed they could improve. They became more interested in math, they worked harder, and their math grades improved. This study demonstrated that perceived progress can significantly impact one's confidence, and that one can learn to value a task over time.<sup>6</sup>*

- *Identify and transfer strengths:* Since youth aren't equally competent in all areas, nor do they value all areas equally, highlight strengths and abilities in one area in order to nurture their overall sense of confidence, and apply strengths to other areas of competence.<sup>7</sup>
- *Encourage determination:* Promote self-reflection and observation of their own decisions and actions so youth can develop or improve strategies to grow their skills. Finding some success in their failures can embolden their effort.<sup>8</sup>
- *Grow independent thinking:* The perception of progress is central to growing confidence. Help youth identify progress in small and big steps, and provide youth opportunities to develop and practice leadership skills.<sup>9</sup> Defeat stereotypes as beliefs about gender and ability can have a profound influence on a youth's performance and confidence. Highlight role models who defy typical stereotypes, such as women who have excelled in math and science.<sup>10</sup>

*"Self-belief does not necessarily ensure success, but self-disbelief assuredly spawns failure."*

*Albert Bandura*

## References

1. Lerner, Richard M., (2007) *The Good Teen*. New York: The Stonesong Press, LLC.
2. Shunk, D.H., and A.R. Hanson. 1989. Self-modeling and children's cognitive skill learning. *Journal of Educational Psychology* 81(2): 155-63.

## Footnotes

1. Lerner, Richard M., (2007) *The Good Teen*. New York: The Stonesong Press, LLC. p. 76.
2. Lerner, Richard M., (2007) *The Good Teen*. New York: The Stonesong Press, LLC. p. 80.
3. Lerner, Richard M., (2007) *The Good Teen*. New York: The Stonesong Press, LLC. p. 79.
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6. Lerner, Richard M., (2007) *The Good Teen*. New York: The Stonesong Press, LLC. p. 90-91.
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