



6. IMPERFECT? PERFECT!

Building self-esteem through self-acceptance

Targeted competencies (based on ÉKIP and the WHO)	Self-knowledge, self-understanding and self-worth
Content for the development of personal and social competencies (MEQ)	Sheet 13 : Making friends and social network Sheet 14 : Inclusion and getting along
Cross-cutting competencies (QEP)	Achieving their potential Cooperating with others
General objectives of the workshop	By the end of the workshop, students will be able to: • Understand what self-esteem is and the factors that strengthen or weaken it; • Define their real and ideal selves, and the gap between the two; • Use strategies to help build and develop their self-esteem.

Total duration

60-MINUTE version: follow ALL steps, including the ones marked with the icon 

40-MINUTE version: DO NOT follow the steps marked with the icon 

Materials and preparation

- Print the *Exploring your self-esteem* worksheet (1 per student).
- Print the *Real me and ideal me* poster, available on the [website](#) under the section: First cycle / Workshops and tools for students / Classroom posters to support your explanations and reinvest learning in class.
- Have a chalkboard or interactive whiteboard (IWB) available.

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Summer 2025

A. Challenge time! (15 minutes)

1. Ask for four students to volunteer to go to the front of the classroom and attempt a few challenges. They may be solo or group challenges.
2. The challenges given to students should be difficult or impossible, such as:
 - Reciting the alphabet backwards;
 - Licking their own elbow;
 - Interlocking their arms with another student's and then trying to get untangled;
 - Making a long chain of paper clips with their eyes closed.
3. Give the volunteers around 5 minutes to complete the challenges. While the volunteers do their best, encourage the other students in the class to cheer them on.
4. Once the time is up, applaud the volunteers and congratulate them.
5. Next, ask the students in the class to take turns naming strengths and qualities for each of the volunteers. Students can draw inspiration from the list of qualities and strengths presented in the slideshow. If necessary, supplement the list of qualities and strengths mentioned by the students.

- | | |
|---------------|----------------|
| • Funny | • Honest |
| • Persevering | • Enthusiastic |
| • Creative | • Motivated |
| • Respectful | • Attentive |
| • Generous | • Cheerful |
| • Patient | • Responsible |
| • Brave | • Sincere |
| • Organized | • Caring |
| • Positive | • Thoughtful |
| • Observant | • Tolerant |
| • Calm | |

Tip for this exercise

Make sure that the exercise is carried out in a spirit of respect, positivity and fairness. The goal is for students to feel the effects of being complimented and being assigned positive qualities.

6. Next, ask the students who volunteered about how the experience was for them, using the following questions:
 - What did you think of the challenges you were asked to complete? Were they easy or hard?
 - How did you feel while you were doing the challenges?
 - How did you feel when you received compliments?
7. Explain that the goal of the exercise was to put them in a situation that would catch them off balance (e.g., having to attempt impossible challenges, being watched by the whole class, and receiving compliments). Explain that our spontaneous reactions in these kinds of situations of vulnerability often reveal the relationship we have with ourselves: in other words, our self-esteem.



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8. Continue the discussion with the whole group using the following questions:
 - Did you notice any changes in how your classmates looked or acted after receiving a compliment?
 - How do you usually feel when someone compliments you?
 - Is it easy for you to compliment others? Is it easier to give compliments or receive them?

9. Listen to a few answers, then conclude the activity by mentioning that:



Each person has their own **unique strengths and qualities that contribute to their beauty, both inside and out**. It's not pretentious to recognize your own beauty. In fact, it's important for **learning how to love and value yourself!**



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B. Educational clip—Part 1 (5 minutes)

1. Play the video clip *Imperfect? Perfect! —Part 1* for your students.

[Video clip — Part 1](#)



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C. What is self-esteem? (10 minutes)

1. To help students connect with the educational video, ask them to define self-esteem in their own words. Listen to a few answers and complete them with the following explanations:



Having good self-esteem is feeling like you have **importance and VALUE** as a person and are **worthy of love**. Self-esteem comes from the **overall positive or negative assessment of your own value as a person** (American Psychological Association, 2015; Muris, 2001; Orth & Robins, 2014). Self-esteem can be **strong** or **weak**. The **emotions you feel** or the **thoughts** that go through your mind when you think about yourself are **good indicators of your self-esteem** (Carlén et al., 2023; Kőszegi et al., 2022; Rosenberg, 1979).



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2. Using the slideshow, you now present a table (inspired by Thibault et al. [2019]) with example statements associated with strong or weak self-esteem:

Strong self-esteem	Weak self-esteem
“I may have flaws and I may fail sometimes, but I still consider myself to have inherent worth as a person.”	“I’m constantly worried about or even obsessed with my image.”
“I have a good understanding of myself (my strengths and weaknesses) and act accordingly.”	“I feel insecure in social situations and tend to be self-conscious about how others look at me.”



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• “I assert myself and know not to let others be disrespectful toward me.”	• “I tend to make choices that go against my own wants and needs, so I won’t upset others.”
• “I assert myself and make sure I’m treated with respect.”	• “I tend to feel excluded or different from others: more vulnerable, weaker or less competent.”
• “I accept that I can’t be talented and successful at everything, and that fact doesn’t make me a failure.”	• “I have a hard time accepting criticism or dealing with failure.”
• “I recognize my qualities, strengths, abilities and achievements.”	• “It’s hard for me to recognize my qualities, strengths or abilities. I have trouble taking credit for my own achievements.”

3. Briefly ask the students the following three questions and listen to a few answers:

- Do any of these statements sound like how you might describe yourself?
- Which column of statements best describes you?
- What might that say about yourself and your self-esteem?

4. Conclude the activity with these words of encouragement:



It is perfectly normal for your self-esteem to be stronger or weaker for different aspects of yourself. As a teenager, you’re **still building your self-esteem** (Bien et al., 2024; Carlén et al., 2023). Your self-esteem is influenced by **changes in your identity** and by **your interpersonal events and experiences** (Dorard et al., 2013; Guillon & Crocq, 2004), so it’s bound to **evolve over time** (Bien et al., 2024; Carlén et al., 2023; Trzesniewski et al., 2003). What’s important is that you understand your self-esteem in the present moment, **so that you can build it up and strengthen it with kindness, one step at a time!**



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D. Real me or ideal me? (15 minutes)

1. Segue into the next part of the activity, focusing on a way for students to examine their own self-esteem: the **“real me”** and the **“ideal me.”** Explain to students what the **“real me”** and the **“ideal me”** are:

- The **“real me”** is how you view yourself in the present moment—your importance, your successes, your challenges, your strengths and your weaknesses (American Psychological Association, 2015). It’s the reflection you see when you look in the mirror. Your **“real me”** corresponds to the value (positive or negative) you assign to different aspects of yourself (e.g., academic, social, emotional, physical) in the present moment (Ouellet, 2020; Shavelson et al., 1976).

- The “**ideal me**” is the idea of what you think you should ideally be like (American Psychological Association, 2015). It’s the image you have of the best version of yourself. Your “ideal me” therefore corresponds to the value you assign to different aspects (e.g., academic, social, emotional, physical) of the person you wish you could be (Ouellet, 2020; Shavelson et al., 1976).

2. Explain that **self-esteem** is influenced by **the distance, difference or gap** between the “real me” and the “ideal me” (Cervone & Pervin, 2020; Norem-Hebeisen, 1976).



 The greater **the distance, difference or gap** between how you perceive yourself in this moment (the “real me”) and what you think you should be in order to have value and be worthy of love (the “ideal me”), the more your self-esteem is likely to be **affected or weakened**. Conversely, the **closer** your two “me”s are to each other, the more likely your self-esteem is to be **positive, balanced, healthy and strong** (Cervone & Pervin, 2020; Thibault et al., 2019).

3. Give this example:
 - “**Real me**”: At school, I only have two close friends that I get along with. Even though I really care for them, I sometimes feel “weak” or “ugly” in comparison. I feel like I’m less important and less capable of making friends.
 - “**Ideal me**”: I wish I was in a popular social group, like my older sister is. If I had more friends, I would feel like I had more value and importance.
4. Now, hand out the *Exploring your self-esteem* printable worksheet and ask students to fill it out individually. Give them a maximum of 5 minutes.
5. You then discuss the answers with the whole class.
 - What do you think of the difference, distance or gap between your two “me”s?
Are they far apart or close to each other?
 - What might that say about you and your self-esteem?
6. Let students know that it’s normal and common to see some degree of gap between how you see yourself and how you would like to be, especially in a society with lots of social comparison and heavy social pressure!



Social comparison can harm your self-esteem by worsening the perceived gap between the “real me” and the “ideal me” (McComb et al., 2023; Zogmaister & Maricutoiu, 2022).

7. Complete the activity by clarifying what it means **to develop positive, balanced, healthy and strong self-esteem**:



A positive, balanced, healthy and strong self-esteem involves neither **self-glorification** (e.g., overvaluing yourself, trying to appear unshakeable, never doubting yourself, always putting yourself first over other people), nor **self-trivialization** (e.g., judging yourself harshly, devaluing yourself, minimizing your own successes, making yourself invisible).

Rather, it’s about having a **kind but realistic assessment of yourself** (Neff, 2011; Neff & Vonk, 2009; Ouellet, 2020). Or, in other words, bringing your two “me”s closer together! And there are ways to do that!

E. Your turn! (5 minutes)

1. Explain that there are various strategies you can use to bring those two “me”s closer together. Ask the students to name some potential strategies.
2. Listen to a few answers, then supplement them by presenting the following list of **strategies for building and strengthening your self-esteem**, inspired by Thibault et al. (2019):
 - Be aware of your inner dialogue (thoughts and emotions about yourself);
 - Avoid disparaging or overly demanding thoughts about yourself;
 - Be mindful of the words you use to talk about yourself;
 - Criticize yourself less and don’t judge yourself too harshly;
 - Don’t define yourself solely by difficult or past experiences;
 - Take a fresh look at yourself, and see what is beautiful within you;
 - Develop a kinder and more forgiving inner dialogue;
 - Get a better understanding of your strengths and weaknesses;
 - Accept yourself as you are;
 - Welcome criticism and treat it as an opportunity to learn;
 - Be open to compliments from others;
 - Write down your good qualities, accomplishments and successes in a journal;
 - Assert yourself calmly and respectfully;
 - Allow yourself to say no, even if it may disappoint others;
 - Leave your comfort zone and dare to take risks;
 - Accept the possibility of failure;
 - Try not to compare yourself to others... Instead, compare yourself to yourself!



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3. Finally, conclude with these words:



Are you imperfect? Perfect! You don't need to be perfect in order to love yourself, to be loved by others, and to recognize that you have inherent worth. "Achieving perfect self-esteem is impossible" (Thibault et al., 2019, p. 10). Being kinder to ourselves, regardless of our weaknesses, failings and faults, helps to build our self-esteem. **In other words, accept yourself for who you are: no more, no less!** And never forget that you can always take steps to evolve and grow! Changing, adjusting or improving the way you see yourself to make your "real me" more positive and realistic helps reduce the gap between your "real me" and your "ideal me," and that helps boost your self-esteem!

F. Meditation on strengths (5 minutes)

1. Next, ask the students to close their eyes for a minute and meditate. You can dim the lights or play soothing music if you wish.
2. Ask the students to take a few deep breaths.
3. Gently suggest that they reflect on a personality trait or characteristic of theirs that they especially like (a strength or quality). This can be a strength or quality that someone else previously used to describe them.
4. Tell them to let the answer come to them naturally, without rushing to find a perfect answer.
5. Once the students have each found their strength or quality, tell them to take a moment to silently compliment themselves about this trait.
6. Next, ask them to also notice the emotions, thoughts or physical feelings that accompany this compliment.
 - How does it feel to give yourself permission to reflect on what you like about yourself?
 - When do you take time to recognize and appreciate the positive in you?
7. You give them a minute to feel. Encourage them to welcome whatever comes up, without judging or trying to change anything.
8. Next, suggest that they imagine how they could use this strength or quality in their life.
 - How does that make you feel inside?
 - What does it create for those around you?

9. Like before, give the students time to visualize the idea and consider how it feels. Then, suggest that they apply that strength or quality in their real life over the next few days. Give them time to take in this suggestion.
10. Finally, gently conclude the meditation by inviting the students to open their eyes, stretch and yawn if necessary before returning to the group.
11. If time permits, ask if a few students wish to share their experience.
12. Conclude by giving some explanations about meditation:



Meditation is simply taking the time to settle into a comfortable position—maybe in silence or with soft music playing—to help centre yourself for a moment and gently refocus. Then you can concentrate on a specific thing and consider it from a fresh perspective. It doesn't need to be long or complicated. You can gradually start meditating for a little longer or on different things, depending on your needs and how it makes you feel (André, 2009).

G. Educational clip—Part 2 (5 minutes)

1. Play the video clip *Imperfect? Perfect! —Part 2* for your students.
[Video clip — Part 2](#)



H. OFF-TRAIL challenge

This week, encourage the students to build and develop their self-esteem by trying to bridge the gap between their two “me”s (real me and ideal me). Encourage students to: 1) pay attention to their inner dialogue (emotions and thoughts about themselves) and how it affects their self-esteem; and 2) turn criticisms about themselves (weakness, imperfections, difficulties, undesired aspects) into kinder, more positive and more realistic statements. Lastly, invite them to 3) use some of the strategies covered in the workshop to improve their self-esteem.



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PRINTABLE WORKSHEET

Exploring your self-esteem



1. Explore your “Real Me” and your “Ideal Me”!

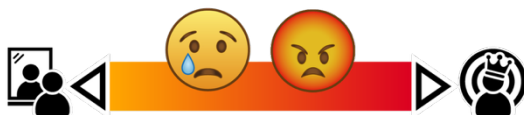
- **Describe your “Real Me”:** How you view yourself—your worth, your importance. It’s the reflection you see when you look in the mirror in the present moment (in terms of academic, social, emotional, physical or other aspects).

- **Describe your “Ideal Me”:** What you think you should ideally be like. It’s who you wish you were—a “better” or “best” version of yourself (in terms of academic, social, emotional, physical or other aspects).

2. How big is the gap between your two “me”s? Are they

- ☐ **Far apart** (lower or weaker self-esteem); or
- ☐ **Close together** (positive, balanced, healthy and strong self-esteem).

ARE THEY
FAR APART?



OR CLOSE
TOGETHER?

