

Says Negative Things About Themselves

(True Self-Description vs. “Not Good Enough”)

Many children struggle with their self-esteem and sense of self-worth. Feelings of discouragement and unhappiness often accompany low esteem and add to their problem. Where character development is concerned, the absence of positive esteem, evidenced by saying negative things about themselves, is a fairly serious problem. Not because these statements reflect low self-esteem but because they are typically not accurate. Honesty depends on accurate self-descriptions, and when children cannot or will not do that, they are more likely to engage in hurting themselves or others. This activity will help children be true to themselves and be accurate about what they think, feel, and do.

1. Define

Explain that *true self-description* means being able to tell about (or describe) yourself honestly. You can tell about how you feel, what you think, and how you are behaving. If you are able to tell about yourself honestly, you are showing true self-description skills. Sometimes it might be hard for you to tell the whole truth about yourself, and sometimes you cannot seem to say exactly how you feel. This is normal. Most of us are not quite good enough at describing ourselves and our behavior. In this lesson, you will learn how to get better at true self-description.

2. Memory Method

To help children understand and remember the concept of true self-description, teach them the following verse.

What am I doing? What do I feel?

I can tell you what's true and real.

Teach this with a singsong rhythm. Place emphasis on “doing,” “feel,” “you,” and “real.” Repeat the verse together several times aloud. You may want to repeat it occasionally as you go through the other parts of this lesson. You can use it as situations arise naturally at home when you want a child to tell you what happened and his or her part in it.

3. Situational Context

- Read the following story example of a situation where true self-description was helpful.

Lillian was holding her little sister. Her little sister is one-and-a-half years old. She is really cute and Lillian likes playing with her. All of a sudden, her little sister started crying. Lillian's mom came running into the room. "What happened?" she asked. "I don't know," Lillian said. "She just started crying." "Did you do anything that might have made her cry?" her mom asked. "Um...maybe," Lillian said. "Well, what did you do?" her mom asked. "I think I was holding her too tightly," admitted Lillian. "I kept holding on to her even when I could tell she wanted to get away."

Explain that true self-description helps in a situation like this. Because Lillian was able to think about what she did, she will be able to play more happily with her little sister. (Lillian won't squeeze her sister too hard any more.)

- Read the following story example of a situation where true self-description was not applied.

Omar and Rebecca were eating lunch together at school. Omar kept taking food from Rebecca's lunch without asking. Omar ate four of Rebecca's potato chips. He ate half of her peanut butter and jelly sandwich. He ate two of her chocolate cookies. Omar got up for a minute to get a drink of water. When he came back, he saw Rebecca was eating his tuna fish sandwich. He yelled, "Put that down, Rebecca! I want to eat that! Why are you eating my lunch?" He started crying. A teacher came over and said, "Omar! Rebecca! What happened?"

Omar pointed at Rebecca and yelled, "She ate my sandwich!"

Ask your child what else Omar should tell the teacher. ("I ate some of her lunch, too. I didn't ask her if it was okay.") If Omar had been able to think about what he did instead of what Rebecca did, it would have made sense to him why Rebecca thought it would be okay to eat his sandwich. Omar's self-description skills are not good enough.

- Read the following story example of a situation where true self-description is helpful.

Robin went over to her friend Max's house to play. Max's grandmother lives with him. His grandmother was sick and she needed a lot of sleep. Robin and Max said hello to her and then they went out and played in the backyard. They ran around so much that they got tired and thirsty and decided to go in the house. Max told Robin a funny joke as they walked into the house through the back door. It made her laugh hard. Then she thought about what she was doing. She was making a lot of noise

and she might bother Max's grandma. "Oh, sorry," whispered Robin, "I was laughing really loud. I'll be quieter so I don't bother your grandma."

Did Robin have true self-description skills? (Yes. She told Max she knew she was being too loud.)

4. "True Self-Description" Activity

To help children become more clear about what it means to be totally truthful in their self-descriptions, make the following statements. Then ask the question, "Is that totally true or not good enough?"

- I am wearing one shoe. (This is true but not good enough. I am actually wearing two.)
- I am speaking as softly as I can. (This is not true. My self-description is not good enough. I can speak more softly. Show them!)
- I am smiling the biggest smile I can. (This is totally true! Show them that you cannot make your smile any bigger.)
- I am shouting as loud as I can. (This is not totally true. I could be much louder!)
- I am wearing pants. (You can have a little joke with them on this one. If they say, "True," in answer to your question, you can say, "No, not good enough." Then explain by saying something like, "I'm also wearing a shirt, a jacket, a belt, socks, shoes, and a scarf!")
- The sky is totally blue. (Probably not good enough—are there also white clouds?)
- There is a person in the room. (True, but not good enough. There is a person in the room but there is also another person there as well.)
- Finish up by stating a few more things that are true, such as, "I have curly hair," "I wear glasses," or "I am your mother or father." Ask if your child would like to try to give a description that it totally true.

5. Description Method

Have your child close his eyes or put his hands over them.

Then ask him to describe the room you're in. (What color are the walls? The ceiling? The floor? What color is the furniture? Are there any pictures on the walls? How many? How many lamps?)

After he has described the room say, "Now, describe yourself." Give him some leading questions if he doesn't know what to say. (How does your voice sound? Does it sound happy and excited or does it sound bored? Are you speaking loudly or softly? How do you look? Are you sitting up straight? Are you leaning forward? Are you smiling or frowning? Are you raising or lowering your eyebrows?)

Tell your child to keep his eyes closed until you say he can open them.

Tell him to answer the questions silently, in his mind. (Do you wish I would let you watch TV? Are you smiling? Are you feeling nervous? Are you bored? Are you tired of having your eyes closed? Are you resting your elbows on the table? Do you think this is fun? What are you thinking about?)

Periodically throughout the week, stop what your child is doing and ask him to describe what he is thinking, doing, and feeling at that very moment. Then together decide if it is accurate or "not good enough." How can he get better at giving a more accurate description of himself?

6. Tie it Together

Though we all struggle sometimes with self-doubt, we can also choose to demonstrate integrity by learning how to describe ourselves accurately. When you hear your child saying negative things about himself, stop the behavior and ask him to describe himself more accurately. Remind him that all the negative things (though some may be true) are not a "good enough" description. He's not paying attention to the positive qualities he possesses. Encourage him to focus more on the positive things he does and look at the negative as indicators of things he can improve. Accurately describing himself will help him accomplish this.