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Talking regularly with youth about the dangers of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs reduces their risk of using in the first place.

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Know! To R-E-S-P-E-C-T Yourself and Celebrate Red Ribbon Week

We see a lot of colored ribbons out there, symbolizing various important causes; so what makes the red ribbon so special? The **Red Ribbon Campaign[®]** stands out because it impacts the health, safety and well-being of each and every one of our children during adolescence and beyond.

Red Ribbon Week officially kicks off October 23rd and this year's theme is, "Respect Yourself. Be Drug Free." The focus is on self-worth and dignity, encouraging youth to make positive lifestyle choices through such messaging as: "Love Yourself;" "Be Confident;" "Be Resilient;" "Be Strong."

Why highlight "self-love?" Because youth with low self-love/self-esteem are at a much greater risk for alcohol and drug abuse. They are more likely to give in to peer pressure when their friends begin experimenting with substances, and they are more likely to turn to alcohol and other drugs in an attempt to escape reality (and who they really are).

Where do such thoughts come from? When children are recipients of constant criticism and/or they feel like they aren't living up to their parents' standards; when youth are treated poorly by peers, are bullied, or are victims of racism; when young people feel like they don't fit in or when they dislike their appearance; when youth fail to meet their teachers', coaches' or their own expectations in the classroom or in extracurricular activities; and anytime a child is abused (physically, mentally, sexually) - these are all common causes for low self-esteem.

Tell your students to rest assured, even those peers who appear to be the most confident, more than likely have some self-esteem issues. It's a natural part of adolescence. It is when it becomes overwhelming that it is a real problem. Try reading through these self-improvement tips and sharing them in the classroom. Every student can benefit from a boost in self-esteem.

Talk early and often about alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Even when it gets tough.



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- Let go of the negative thoughts about yourself. Instead, focus on your strengths. Write down five things you do well, post it on your bedroom mirror and refer to it when you're feeling low.
- Forget perfectionism. Strive for your personal best and continued progress.
- Give yourself a break. Know that everyone makes mistakes. View mishaps as learning opportunities.
- Try something new and be proud of your bravery.
- Help others. Try tutoring, volunteering in a local pet shelter or mentoring a younger student. You'll be amazed at how good it feels and how much it lifts your self-esteem.
- Know the things you can change and accept the things you cannot. Eye color, body type and race are all givens. But if you need to be a little more outgoing to make a new friend, be daring and say, "hello."
- Exercise Daily. It's a natural stress-buster that is good for the mind and body.

Red Ribbon Week is designed to motivate, educate and empower the young people in our lives to be drug free. For more information and tips on keeping youth drug free, please visit RedRibbon.org.

Sources: [Red Ribbon: Respect Yourself. Be Drug Free.](#) [AlcoholRehab.com: Addiction and Low Self-Esteem.](#) [WebMD: Teen Health - Improving Self-Esteem.](#)