

1987

## A Day in the Life...

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### Recommended Citation

Johnson, Craig E., "A Day in the Life..." (1987). *Faculty Publications - School of Education*. Paper 64.  
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# A Day in the Life...

**Goal:** To demonstrate how routine daily events can raise and lower self-esteem.

The level of positive or negative feelings we hold about ourselves can fluctuate daily. Sometimes even the routine events of life can cause our sense of self-worth to plummet. This activity is designed to help students recognize the influence of daily interactions and events on perceptions of self-value and can serve as a springboard for discussion of how to build self-esteem and redirect negative selfthoughts. This exercise is adapted from the Sidney Simon's booklet *I am Loveable and Capable: A Modern Allegory on the Classical Put-Down* (Niles, Illinois: Argus Communications, 1973).

First, I have students tear a blank sheet of paper from their notebooks and label this paper "Self-Esteem." Then I tell them that I will be reading a list of events that could happen in the life of a typical student. They are to play the role of the student in the story. If an event lowers their self-esteem, they are to tear off a piece of paper. If a situation builds up their feelings of self-worth, they are to add a fragment back onto the sheet. The greater the positive or negative influence of the event is upon their self-esteem, the larger the slip of paper will become.

The following sample list of events is designed for traditional college undergraduates but may be changed for older or younger students.

- You are late for class because your alarm goes off 30 minutes late.
- The instructor calls on you and you don't know the answer.
- You get an exam back and do better than you expected.
- You have an appointment to meet a friend for lunch but that person doesn't show up.
- You are on time for your afternoon class.
- You get assigned to a project group with your worst enemy.
- After class you return to your room to study and find your roommate's clothes all over the floor. You object and an argument breaks out. You go to the library to study.
- At the tennis courts, a good looking classmate wanders over to say "Hi."
- After dinner, you get ready for your date. While looking in the mirror, you discover a huge pimple on your chin.
- The movie you chose to go to on your date is a colossal bore.
- After-the-movie conversation is fun; over pizza, you find you have a lot in common.
- You ask your date to come over to your room but s/he has to be in early.
- You attempt a goodnight kiss, but are informed that your breath smells like the pepperoni you had on your after-the-movie pizza.

Following the completion of this story, I ask how much of the original self-esteem sheets remain - and if this is typical of my students' experiences. Also, we discuss which types of events are most damaging to self-esteem. For some students, relational failures are most devastating; for others, failures in the classroom or on the job are most troublesome. Since the story generally leaves participants with shreds of their original self-esteem sheets, we talk about how to build up feelings of selfworth. Revising negative intrapersonal communication is one strategy. Negative self-directed messages that arise in response to unpleasant external events (i.e. "I'm a failure," "I always say the wrong thing") can be restated in a more constructive manner (i.e. "I may have failed today, but if I prepare, I won't fail tomorrow," "Nobody's Perfect.") Another strategy is to build tasks or activities into the daily routine which can be accomplished successfully. These successes can help restore self-esteem when failure diminishes feelings of selfworth.