

We're here to help.

Building Self Esteem

Self esteem is about the way you see and value yourself. If you like yourself, believe in yourself and can accept your imperfections, then you have good self esteem. Self esteem enables you to be resilient despite failures and down times, because you have a balanced sense of self worth. Good self esteem doesn't mean you won't experience sadness, regret or a sense of failure at times, but it will enable you to keep that in perspective and maintain an overall sense of self worth.

Self esteem is affected by what we think and what we do; by working on these two things, we can improve our self esteem, step by step. This fact sheet provides many ideas on how to improve and maintain good self esteem, and offers a set of 5 tasks for you to complete.

SELF ESTEEM AND THINKING

It may be that you've been influenced in how you think about yourself by criticism from people around you, either as a child and/or as an adult. It is normal for this to have an effect on our confidence and self worth.

The messages we get from those around us can affect how we think about ourselves, even if they are not facts. For example, people may have said you were inadequate in some way, or compared you unfavourably to other people. By remembering and focusing on these messages we can convince ourselves that they are true and see ourselves in a negative way that is quite unfair and inaccurate.

We can get in the habit of thinking negatively and ignoring any new information that doesn't match. We can discount compliments because we think they can't be true because we are not really good enough, and we remember the mistakes and the criticisms. In this way poor self image is made stronger and stronger, because we are only taking notice of things that support that view.

We are often harder on ourselves than we would be on other people. The things we do are so familiar to us, that we may take them for granted. It's important to stop and notice the things you do well and the good points you have, just like you might notice good things about other people.

NEGATIVE THINKING

It's ok to feel uncertain, have down times or make mistakes, but if that is your main focus, your thinking gets tuned to the negative all the time. Life has ups and downs but an over-focus on the negative is unrealistic and unhelpful to you.

Negative thinking is habit which can be changed with patient practice. Be aware when you are thinking negatively and focus on the full range of facts of the situation.

You can change negative thinking patterns if you:

- Talk to yourself as kindly as you would to a friend. You would challenge negative thoughts of your friend by pointing out the other facts and helping them keep perspective.
- Look at things in an unbiased way and stop feeling guilty. If you 'make a mistake' look for cause and effect rather than right or wrong, good or bad. If you think you did something that had a negative effect, just note it and resolve to do it differently next time, don't blame and berate yourself. 'Mistakes' are merely valuable lessons, as we learn and grow from our experience.
- Accept compliments. Don't protest them, even in your head! Enjoy and remember them.
- Don't blame yourself for things beyond your control, or things that other people were responsible for. Be realistic about what is really 'your problem'.
- Avoid comparing yourself to others. Often we will compare our mistakes and faults to other people's talents and assets! It's ok – in fact it's important – to be your own unique self.

SELF ESTEEM AND DOING

Other approaches to building your self esteem involve taking action. A great way to build your feelings of self worth is to DO things, achieve things and experience success first hand. It is easy to dwell on the negative and feel left out, if you don't have much to do or anything to look forward to.

By achieving goals and participating in things we enjoy, we build our sense of self worth, purpose and belonging. For example:

- Have realistic expectations of yourself. Be careful not to take on too much, or expect to do things perfectly. Do what's realistic. Set reasonable, achievable and flexible goals and plan the steps to achieve them. Then take action and be sure to notice and celebrate as you achieve each step. You can aim to do things well, but it's important to enjoy yourself too!
- The things you enjoy are likely to be aligned with your talents and they are what make you unique and special. Don't spend your life doing things you dislike such as staying in a discouraging friendship or a job you hate. Follow your dreams and what makes you happy.
- Take responsibility for your life. Blaming others for problems takes away your power in the situation. Look at what action you can take to resolve a problem or improve a situation. Actively following our dreams and goals is also important. When we are active on our own behalf we tend to feel less overwhelmed by the needs and wants of others and more powerful and positive.

Task 4

List the things you enjoy doing. Make a definite plan to do them regularly! Is there something new you can try? Is there someone you can invite to join you?

Plan:

Task 5

Write a description of the sort of life you'd like to live, including a wide range of areas, such as: work, family, relationship, friendships, leisure, physical health, spirituality, home, finances, personal growth, learning, recreation, hobby and so on. Pick 9 areas that are important to you and be sure to include at least one that provides enjoyment for you.

What are your first realistic steps towards achieving that life? Set goals and take action towards creating the life you want.

This year I will:

This month I will:

This week I will:

