



Giving your self-esteem a boost

Being happy with yourself is a great feeling. A sense of well-being is important in our day-to-day lives. Though most of us can't say we're always happy with ourselves, many can say we are happy with ourselves at least some of the time. However, if your sense of self-esteem is low, you can improve it!

What is self-esteem?

Self-esteem is the way we think about ourselves. It is influenced by our temperament and personality.

Building self-esteem starts in childhood and continues throughout our lives. Our self-esteem is shaped by approval and criticism. Regardless of what our childhoods were like, everyone can build his or her self-esteem.

People with high self-esteem have a strong sense of self-worth. They're independent, confident and can take care of themselves. They're not afraid to say or do what's right for them. Such people tend to see the good in themselves and their lives. On the other hand, those with low self-esteem tend to focus on—or imagine—the “bad.”

If you start having doubts about your abilities or feelings, it's an ideal time to identify and value your strengths. Be realistic about the areas in which you could improve. This tip sheet takes a look at self-esteem—what it is, how it affects you, and tips for improving the way you feel about yourself.

How you can build self-esteem

There are many ways to give your self-esteem a boost and feel better about yourself. Try some of the following:

Keep things in perspective

Work and social events can impact how you feel about yourself. Not getting that promotion or going through a divorce can greatly affect your self-esteem. Or sometimes, you feel good about yourself in some areas of your life but not others. For instance, you may be confident at your job, but feel unsure about your parenting skills.

It's easy to focus so much on your own problems that you lose track of the big picture. Just remember: Everyone is subject to life's hills, valleys and curves. It's normal to experience day-to-day changes in your self-esteem.

Identify positive characteristics about yourself

List the positive aspects of your life. Write down your strengths, special talents and the parts of your personality you like best. Focus on one of these attributes to help build your self-esteem. For example, if you're good at painting, spend more time doing it. Strengthening one area can help boost your self-esteem in others. That can help you feel better about yourself.

See things for what they really are

People with low self-esteem often focus on perceptions rather than facts. Some examples include:

- **All-or-nothing thinking**—Seeing things in black-and-white; if you fall short of perfect, you consider yourself a failure.
- **Over-generalization**—Seeing a single negative event as an ongoing pattern of defeat.

- **Mental filter**—Picking out a single negative detail and dwelling on it.
- **Rejecting the positive**—Rejecting positive experiences by saying that they “don’t count.”
- **Jumping to conclusions**—Thinking negative things even though there are no facts to support them.
- **Magnification or minimization**—Blowing out of proportion your own mistakes, or someone else’s achievements.
- **Emotional reasoning**—Assuming that your negative emotions reflect the way things really are.
- **Personalization**—Seeing yourself as the cause of a negative event that you’re not actually responsible for.

Being aware of and avoiding these types of negative thinking is a big step in building self-esteem.

Take care of yourself

The way we treat our bodies and minds is important in developing self-esteem. When we’re living healthy and being careful about our emotional wellness, we tend to feel better about ourselves. Eating right and avoiding the abuse of alcohol and drugs can help. So can avoiding unhealthy relationships. So can getting regular exercise and adequate sleep. It’s also important to take responsibility for our own feelings and behavior.

A great strategy for building self-esteem is to keep a “victory log.” Keep track of both short-term (e.g., cleaning the house) and long-term accomplishments (e.g., buying a car, getting a promotion). By doing so, you build your own mechanism for positive reinforcement.

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