

An Ounce of Prevention

Complimentary

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Self-esteem

-Dr. Kim Maertz, University of Alberta

What is self-esteem?

Self-esteem is the opinion we develop about ourselves in terms of our ability to meet the many challenges of life, and achieve happiness and success. Self-esteem relates to so many areas of our life that we can have high self-esteem in one aspect, and low self-esteem in another. Some people believe that if our self-esteem is too high we will become arrogant, but this is not the case. With true self-esteem comes humility. The following describes common characteristics of people with high and low self-esteem.

High self-esteem

People with high self-esteem tend to:

- Love themselves, and feel worthy of love by others.
- Act in an independent fashion.
- Achieve greater success in life.
- Assume responsibility for their lives, and their choices.
- Take more risks in life.
- Be more creative artistically, and as problem solvers.
- Feel proud of their accomplishments.
- Accept who they are, flaws and all.
- Not be self-centered or egotistical.
- Deal with problems using healthy coping strategies.
- Tolerate greater levels of frustration.
- Be excited by the future, and meet it with a sense of optimism.

Low self-esteem

People with low self-esteem tend to:

- Feel unworthy of love and respect.
- Avoid attempting new activities for fear of failure.
- Constantly fear rejection.
- Put down their own abilities and skills.
- Achieve less success in life (or become over-achievers).
- Be passive in their interactions with others.

- Blame others for their problems and mistakes.
- Constantly seek out the approval of others.
- Have poorly defined self-identities, and instead change to fit in to the situation.
- Be anxious and insecure around others.
- Use addictive behaviors (i.e., drugs, alcohol, food, sex, gambling, smoking, shopping, work, etc.) to cope with their painful feelings.
- Be filled with many kinds of fears, particularly about the future.

Given all the potential benefits of having higher self-esteem, the question then becomes can we do anything to raise it and, if so, how? The answer to the first question is that self-esteem is indeed affected by the daily choices we make, and by the actions we take. The following strategies can help you raise your self-esteem.

Strategies

1. Develop consistent self-care activities.

Just as how others treated us in the past impacted significantly on our self-esteem, how we treat ourselves everyday influences how we value ourselves. Self-care includes such things as: eating a healthy diet, getting optimal amounts of sleep, doing regular exercise, practicing good hygiene, taking time to do things you enjoy, wearing clothes that you really like, treating yourself well each day, and making your living space somewhere you really enjoy to be. Feeling out of shape, exhausted, unattractive, and unhappy leaves us very vulnerable to feelings of insecurity.

2. Keep a record of all of your accomplishments.

Accumulate all of your accomplishments and put them in a scrapbook, file, drawer, chest or room. This may include: trophies, awards, certificates, transcripts, diplomas, degrees, cards of appreciation, or other documents which in some way recognize you. Remember also, you don't need to focus on just your monumental accomplishments, but you can keep a list of more minor victories. Then spend some time at least once a week looking at these accomplishments and congratulating yourself for this success.

3. Develop a list of your strengths or positive qualities.

Write out a list of all the strengths you possess and then add to it as you recognize new ones. Then post this list on your refrigerator, bathroom mirror, or other visible location to remind yourself of these strengths and qualities.

4. Ask for feedback from people who know and appreciate you.

One of the best ways to improve your self image is to get honest and accurate feedback from people who know and value you. As well, once you ask for the feedback, fight the urge to discount it, since this is a common response for anyone who isn't used to positive feedback. Most people would be willing to take this time with you. Also don't forget to write down the feedback, so you can refer back to it at times you are struggling.

5. Indulge yourself in activities you enjoy.

By indulging yourself, you are communicating to yourself that you deserve to be treated well. This could include anything you love doing like: reading, going to a movie, seeing a friend, having a nap, playing with a pet, going for a walk, riding a bike or getting a massage. The list is endless, depending on what you enjoy.

6. Quit comparing yourself to others.

Comparing yourself to others might help your self-esteem, if you in fact compare yourself to people who are less skilled or talented than you are. However, most people who struggle with self-esteem issues do the opposite and compare themselves to others who excel in the areas they value, and therefore end up feeling defeated. Instead, compare yourself to yourself and look for the progress you have made in your pursuit of competence and success.

7. Fill your life with healthy, positive and supportive people.

Leave or distance yourself from any relationship that does not support your healthy sense of self, particularly with people who are highly negative and unsupportive. It is difficult to support your own sense of self when others are tearing it down.

8. Set yourself up for success.

Seek out situations and opportunities where you have a high probability of success. However, make sure that some of these situations test your abilities to give yourself a true sense of accomplishment. When you are successful, celebrate your success rather than simply moving on to another challenge.

9. Don't dwell on your weaknesses

Accept the fact that every human being has weaknesses and that they are inevitable. Just look around you and you will easily discover this. It's not just you. No matter how much you try to eliminate your weaknesses, they will exist, so instead accept them. At least accept most of them and if you really feel motivated to do so, isolate a few and work on them if they are indeed changeable.

10. Let go of perfectionism.

Feeling like you need to be perfect robs you of the opportunity to appreciate your daily accomplishments and achievements if they are not up to your unrealistic expectations. If the only time you feel good about yourself is when you have a perfect performance, this will be rare. You have the ability to lower your expectations for yourself and by doing so, your self-esteem can soar. View mistakes as simply opportunities to learn, not a reason to beat yourself up.

11. Replace negative self-talk with positive self-statements.

What we tell ourselves day after day is what we come to believe. This being the case, we need to create a new, more positive script for ourselves. Stop listening to your inner critical voice and if you like, even give your critical voice a name so that you can begin to see it as something separate from yourself. Foster a new voice which is more positive, self-accepting and supportive.

12. Develop and use daily affirmations.

Daily affirmations are self-statements that you have usually written down and can repeat to yourself on a daily basis. Some typical self-esteem building affirmations include:

- Despite my weaknesses, I accept myself.
- I accept my thoughts, feelings, beliefs and values, even if they are different than other people's.
- I do not have to be perfect to love and appreciate myself, or be loved and appreciated by others.

Helping Children Cope with Trauma

<http://www.aftertheinjury.org/>

A web site designed for parents whose child has experienced a Pediatric injury.

Benefits of EMDR

A series of video stores about the value and benefits of EMDR can be found by googling "scoopit" then "EMDR"

Net News

Here are some web sites you & your family may find helpful:

Search: 10 of the best yoga poses for sleep

Search: Innovative Therapy Helps Minnesotans Recover from Trauma

Search: The one thing these crazy successful people do every morning

Search: Can Meditation Change Compassionate Behavior?

Search: Mindfulness Meditation Training Changes Brain Structure in Eight Weeks

Self-Help Corner:

City of Edmonton Community Resources: 211
Support Network / Distress Line: 780-482-HELP
Kids Help Line: 1-800-668-6868