

## Self-Esteem

Self-esteem develops throughout our lives based on our experiences with different people and activities. How we are treated by our immediate family and the people who are close to us during our childhood can have a significant impact on our self-esteem. Possible reasons for low self-esteem include negative experiences with family members early on, a history of learning disabilities (small or large), and being teased by peers or family on a consistent basis. We can also pick up a tendency for low self-esteem from our parents, as they often pass on their fears and emotional difficulties without even noticing.

The different faces of low self-esteem:

1. The person acts happy and successful but is feeling terrified of failure. He/she is constantly trying to achieve perfection.
2. The person acts like the opinions of others don't matter; he/she gets in trouble with the law and often tries to fight authority.
3. The person acts hopeless. He/she is always waiting to be rescued, has problems with assertiveness, and relies excessively on others in close relationships.

Low self-esteem can produce anxiety, stress, and loneliness in everyday life. It also increases the risk for depression. When someone has a poor self-image, he/she may have problems with relationships, job impairment, or low academic achievement. Low self-esteem also can increase vulnerability to drug and alcohol use.

Steps to helping improve your self-esteem:

(Remember, these steps will only help if you believe that you can help yourself!)

1. Challenge your inner critic:
  - Reassure yourself
  - Don't over-generalize negative experiences; there are often specific circumstances that lead up to a negative experience that must be taken into account.
  - Challenge illogical self judgments.
  - Be objective – every situation is different, take into consideration everything in the situation before you make an assumption that you are to blame for a situation. You aren't to blame for every situation going wrong.
2. Practice self-nurturing:

Challenge past negative experiences by nurturing and caring for yourself.

  - Practice basic self-care, such as eating right, getting exercise, and getting enough sleep each night.
  - Plan fun things for yourself.
  - Reward yourself for your accomplishments.
  - Forgive yourself for your shortcomings.
3. Get help from others:

Getting help from other people in the present can help negate the negative experiences of the past.

  - Go to a friend.  
Ask a friend to listen to you.

Ask for a hug.

Ask people who love you to tell you that from time to time.

- Go to a therapist or counselor.

Talking to a professional is not shameful or a sign of weakness.

Getting help when you are in pain is a sign of strength.