

Strengthening your Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is a term used in psychology to reflect a person's overall evaluation or appraisal of one's own worth. Low self-esteem can be a constant companion for many people, especially those who experience depression, anxiety, phobias, psychosis, delusional thinking, or who have an illness or a disability. If you are one of these people, you may go through periods of life feeling bad about yourself needlessly. Low self-esteem keeps you from enjoying life, doing the things you want to do, and working toward personal goals.

You have a right to feel good about yourself. However, it can be very difficult to feel good about yourself when you are under the stress of having symptoms that are hard to manage, when you are having a difficult time, or when others are treating you badly. At these times, it is easy to be drawn into a downward spiral of lowered self-esteem. For example feeling bad about yourself when someone insults you, or when you are under a lot of pressure at work, or you are having a difficult time getting along with someone in your family. This is where negative self-talk, like 'I'm no good' begins. By using the tips and activities list below you can begin avoiding doing things that make you feel even worse and do those things that will make you feel better about yourself.

As you begin to use the tips below you may experience some feelings of resistance to positive feelings about yourself. This is normal. Don't let these feelings stop you from feeling good about yourself. They will diminish as you feel better about yourself. To help relieve these feelings, let your friends know what you are going through. Have a good cry if you need to. Do things to relax.

Keep the following statement in mind, "I am a very special, unique, and valuable person. I deserve to feel good about myself".

Things You Can Do Right Away - Every Day - To Raise Your Self-Esteem

- Pay attention to your own needs and wants
- Eat healthy foods and avoid highly processed fast foods
- Exercise
- Take time to do things you enjoy
- Get something done that you have been putting off
- Do things that make use of your own special talents and abilities
- Dress in clothes that make you feel good about yourself
- Give yourself rewards
- Spend time with people who make you feel good about yourself
- Make your living space a place that honours the person you are
- Display items that you find attractive
- Make your meals a special time
- Learn something new or improve your skills
- Begin doing those things that you know will make you feel better about yourself
- Do something nice for another person
- Make it a point to treat yourself well every day



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Changing Negative Thoughts About Yourself To Positive Ones

You may be rehearsing negative messages about yourself right now. Many people do. Stop and think about where these messages are coming from. These are messages that you learned when you were young. You learned from many different sources including other children, your teachers, family members, caregivers, even from the media, and from prejudice and stigma in our society.

Once you have learned them, you may have repeated these negative messages over and over to yourself, especially when you were not feeling well or when you were having a hard time. You may have come to believe them. You may have even worsened the problem by making up some negative messages or thoughts of your own. These negative thoughts or messages lower your self-esteem.

You may think these thoughts or give yourself these negative messages so often that you are hardly aware of them. Pay attention to them. Carry a small note pad with you as you go about your daily routine for several days and write down negative thoughts about yourself whenever you notice them. Some people say they notice more negative thinking when they are tired, sick, or dealing with a lot of change.

It helps to take a closer look at your negative thought patterns to check out whether or not they are true. You may want a close friend or counsellor to help you with this. When you are in a good mood and when you have a positive attitude about yourself, ask yourself the following questions about each negative thought you have noticed:

- Is this message really true?
- Would a person say this to another person? If not, why am I saying it to myself?
- What do I get out of thinking this thought? If it makes me feel badly about myself, why not stop thinking it?

The next step in this process is to develop positive statements you can say to yourself to replace these negative thoughts whenever you notice yourself thinking them. In developing these thoughts, use positive words like 'happy, peaceful, loving, enthusiastic, and warm'.

Avoid using negative words such as 'worried, frightened, upset, tired, bored, not, never, can't'. Don't make a statement like "I am not going to worry anymore." Instead say "I'll focus on the positive" or whatever feels right to you. Another example is substitute "should" with "it would be nice if". Always use the present tense, such as 'I am healthy', 'I am well', 'I am happy', 'I have a good job', as if the condition already exists. Also use 'I, me, or your own name'.

Two Activities That Can Help You Feel Good About Yourself

Make Affirming Lists

Making lists, rereading them often, and rewriting them from time to time will help you to feel better about yourself. If you have a journal, you can write your lists there.

Make a list of

- At least five of your strengths, for example, persistence, courage, friendliness, creativity
- At least five things you admire about yourself, for example the way you have raised your children, your good relationship with your brother, or your spirituality
- The five greatest achievements in your life so far, like recovering from a serious illness, graduating from high school, or learning to use a computer
- At least 20 accomplishments - they can be as simple as learning to tie your shoes, to getting an advanced college degree
- 10 ways you can "treat" or reward yourself that don't include food and that don't cost anything, such as walking in woods, window-shopping, watching children playing on a playground, gazing at a baby's face or at a beautiful flower, or chatting with a friend
- 10 things you can do to make yourself laugh
- 10 things you could do to help someone else
- 10 things that you do that make you feel good about yourself

Mutual Complimenting Exercise

Get together for 10 minutes with a person you like and trust. This person can be a friend a partner a family member. Set five minutes on a watch or clock. One of you begins by complimenting the other person stating the positives about the other person for the first five minutes. Then swap where the other person does the same thing for the next five minutes. Notice how you feel about yourself before and after this exercise. Repeat this activity often.

Source:

Building Self-Esteem: A Self-Help Guide: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration,
<http://www.athealth.com/Consumer/disorders/self-esteem.html>, 20 September 2011.