

Self-esteem

The way we view and feel about ourselves has a profound effect on how we live our lives. These opinions are shaped by our past experiences and the culture in which we live.

The Background

For many of us, self-esteem can feel conditional and linked to our achievements or acceptance by others. Conversely, success can seem like a great ego booster and academic achievement like an obvious sign of success. However, living in an environment where there is a wealth of talent and obvious competition can challenge the views that people hold of themselves. You may feel that your ability is over-estimated. Students can feel under pressure to do well for the sake of their family, communities or colleges.

What we feel about ourselves is not based solely on what we do. It usually involves our relationships with others and whether we feel worthwhile as people. We have a basic human need to be wanted, noticed and included. Many of us want to contribute, be of value and make a difference—in other words, to matter.

Our self-esteem can fluctuate and be affected by events and encounters with other people. Many of us are constantly judging and evaluating ourselves, often in comparison with others.

Suggestions for Improving Self-esteem

Change is not easy. It means stepping into the unknown and taking a risk. Inevitably, this means that some initiatives will work well while others won't work out as you had hoped. You can help yourself by being realistic in your choices and seeing each success as a step in the right direction. Remember that even small changes add up.

Try to Do Things for Pleasure or Fun

- Think about ways in which you can enjoy yourself. Put effort into making life pleasurable and satisfying.
- Learn something new, something you have always wanted to try or even something you never thought you could do.
- Make time to volunteer for something that you feel passionately about and that connects you with the local or wider community.

Take Care of Yourself Physically

- Try to eat regularly and think about eating more healthy foods.
- Try to get the amount of sleep you need and establish a routine that works for you.
- Exercise to help yourself feel more confident and to connect with your body. Try to pay attention to how you stand and walk.

Use Rewards but Avoid Punishments

- Reward yourself in different ways. How about giving yourself one day off from work a week? Can you buy yourself a little treat? Can you do something you enjoy but don't often get around to doing?
- Listen to your internal dialogue. Can you try to be kinder and more compassionate to yourself?

Cultivate Good Relationships with Yourself and Others

- Are you continually expecting more of yourself than you do of others? If you accept the troubles, mistakes and variability of other people, why not try being happy with “good enough” in relation to yourself?
- Take care to not push other people away by being negative about yourself.
- Join in with others. Be proactive in making and maintaining contact with others.

Work on Your Inner Voice

- Because self-esteem is a product of your own thoughts and opinions, it is something you can build. It takes effort and practice, but you can train yourself to think in more positive and truthful ways about yourself. You can develop more positive opinions and feelings about yourself.
- Start by noticing your inner voice. Is it too critical? Are you too hard on yourself? Pay attention to what you expect from yourself. Replace a need for perfection with an effort to do your best.
- Try to be kinder and more accepting of yourself. Allow yourself to feel good about the things you do accomplish instead of focusing on what you haven't yet accomplished. Let thinking and feeling good about yourself become a daily healthy habit like brushing your teeth, exercising, eating right or getting a good night's sleep.

What is one thing you could start doing today that would help you to feel better about yourself?