

# Self-Esteem

by Ann Reinten AICI CIP



Ever felt a little shaky, not sure if you fitted in, looked the part or had what it takes?

If you answered yes you can breath a little easier knowing that you're not alone. For most people their feelings and thoughts about themselves fluctuate a little each day based on our experiences e.g, how we are treated by those we care about, the marks we may get on an exam or the ups and downs we experience in romantic relationships. Each experience can have a temporary impact on your emotional well-being.

Personal self-esteem, however, is something much more fundamental than the normal "ups and downs" associated with situational change. For those with good self- esteem the normal 'ups and downs' of life only result in limited and temporary fluctuations about how they regard themselves and they bounce-back quickly to a state of feeling good about themselves.

For the suffers of poor self-esteem, these "ups and downs" make all the difference in the world and they become a life-long burden that crushes their potential, limits their relationships, minimises their chance for happiness and fulfilment.

All addictions and many negative life experiences are caused by low self-esteem.

I have always believed that we all have a duty to find the good in all people and situations and to help others see a great future for themselves. When poor self-esteem is evident we can positively impact the life of those we meet by helping them see themselves in a more positive light.

## So what is Self Esteem?

It is the opinion a person has of themselves based on their attitude to the following:

- The value they place on themselves as a person
- The job they do
- Their achievements
- How they think others see them
- Their purpose in life
- Their place in the world
- Their potential for success
- Their strengths and weaknesses
- Their social status
- How others relate to them
- Their independence and self reliance

## Poor Self-Esteem vs. Healthy Self-Esteem

Low self-esteem results from having a poor self image caused by a person's attitude to one or more of the above, such as, not valuing the job they do highly or feeling they have no purpose in your life. **Those with poor self-esteem often rely on how they are doing in the present to determine how they feel about themselves.** They need positive external experiences to counteract the negative feelings and thoughts that constantly plague them. Even then, the good feeling (from a good encounter, etc.) can be temporary.

Healthy Self-Esteem	Low Self-Esteem
Childhood experiences that lead to healthy self-esteem include:	Childhood experiences that lead to low self-esteem include:
being listened to respectfully being spoken to respectfully getting attention and hugs experiencing success in sports or school having trustworthy friends being praised	being harshly criticized being yelled at, or beaten being ignored, ridiculed or teased being expected to be "perfect" all the time experiencing failures in sports or school People with low self-esteem were often given

	messages that failed experiences (losing a game, getting a poor grade, etc.) were failures of their whole self.
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**Healthy self-esteem is based on our person's ability to assess ourselves accurately (know ourselves) and still be able to accept and value ourselves unconditionally.** This means being able to realistically acknowledge our strengths and limitations (which is part of being human) and at the same time accepting ourselves as worthy and worthwhile without conditions or reservation.

## So Where Does Self-Esteem Come From?

Our self-esteem develops as a child and continues evolving throughout our entire life. With every experience and encounter our mental aberrations add or subtract merit points to our self-esteem quota. Experiences during our childhood play a particularly large role in the shaping of our basic self-esteem. When we were growing up, our successes and failures, how we were treated by the members of our immediate family, by our teachers, coaches, religious authorities, and by our peers, all contributed to the creation of our basic self-esteem.

## THREE Faces of Low Self-Esteem

Most of us have an image of what low self-esteem looks like, but it is not always so easy to recognise.

Three common faces of low self-esteem are:

**The Impostor:** This person acts happy and successful, but underneath is terrified of failure. They live with the constant fear that she or he will be "found out." They need continuous successes to maintain the mask of positive self-esteem, which may lead to problems with perfectionism, procrastination, competition, and burn-out. Sometime it takes just a little scratching of their surface or rocking of their boat to have them fall completely apart.

**The Rebel:** This person acts like the opinions or good will of others (especially those of people who are important or powerful), don't matter at all. They live with the constant anger of not feeling "good enough." They continuously need to prove that the 'judgments and criticisms' of others don't hurt, which may lead to problems like blaming others excessively, breaking rules or laws, or fighting authority.

**The Loser:** This person acts as though they are helpless and unable to cope with the world. They wait for people to come to the rescue. They use self-pity or indifference as a shield against fear of taking responsibility for changing his or her life and they look constantly to others for guidance, which can lead to such problems as lacking assertiveness skills, under-achievement, and excessive reliance on others in relationships.

## Strategies to Create a Healthy Self-Esteem

### What not to do:

- Don't indulge in self criticism, low self esteem feeds on negative messages and thoughts so silence your inner critic.
- Don't try to please everyone all the time. It is considerate when you care about others feelings but your needs are just as important. Value yourself, do not neglect yourself.
- Don't try to be like someone else. This leads to lack of self worth and confidence. Every person is unique and cannot be someone else. Strive to be better, but do not criticise yourself for not being as successful, as beautiful, as slim or as popular as someone else.
- Don't take life or yourself so seriously. Failure just means you are not successful YET. Everybody fails on their way to succeeding, don't look on it as failure but as a means to learning. Problems tend to make you stronger if you strive to overcome them.

### What to do:

Self worth, confidence and assuredness increases when a person focuses on their needs and desires. Everyone deserves to live life as they want. This is not selfishness if what a person wants does not hurt others or prevent them from living life on their terms.

- Focus on your successes. Lack of confidence feeds on feelings of failure and inadequacy. Remember all the truly successful things you have done in your life.
- Reward yourself when you do succeed.

- Use visualisation to achieve your dreams and increase your self esteem!
- Focus on your strengths. Use them. Those who succeed are true to themselves.
- Develop and work at achieving your goals. This increases confidence helps develop positive feelings.
- Strive to do your best at everything you try. Self criticism will shrivel as a person comes to understand that even if they do not succeed they were worthy for giving it their best.
- Fertilise the brain by reading inspiring books - they really help.
- Feed your mind with positive affirmations. They can overcome persistent negative thought and help to promote a healthy state of mind.

## Affirmations

Affirmations combat negative mental baggage. Without realising it we can be telling ourselves negative things constantly. The more we talk to our selves negatively the deeper the mental groove gets and the harder it is to change your thinking. The result of this is a destructive belief system which holds a person back and prevents success. One effective way to change this belief system so that it becomes helpful is to replace misguided negative messages with new positive ones.

Affirmations really work but the power they have to alter a life will make itself felt only if they are repeated DAILY and when you are thinking negatively. It is most effective when a person focuses on one affirmation and takes the time to consider what it means to them in their life.

Sample affirmations:

- I deserve to be happy and successful
- I have the power to change myself
- I can forgive and understand others and their motives
- I can make my own choices and decisions
- I am free to choose to live as I wish and to give priority to my desires
- I can choose happiness whenever I wish no matter what my circumstances
- I am flexible and open to change in every aspect of my life
- I act with confidence having a general plan and accept plans are open to alteration
- It is enough to have done my best
- I deserve to be loved

## 14 Ways to Boost Self Esteem

1. **Think back to when you did something new for the first time.** Learning something new is often accompanied by feelings of nervousness, lack of self belief and high stress levels, all of which are necessary parts of the learning process. Explain to your clients that the next time they feel under-confident, remembering this will remind them that it's perfectly normal - they are just learning!
2. **Do something you have been putting off.** Like writing or calling a friend, cleaning the house, tidying the garden, fixing the car, organising the bills, making a tasty and healthy meal - anything that involves them making a decision, then following it through!
3. **Do something you are good at; swimming, running, dancing, cooking, gardening, climbing, painting, writing...** If possible, it should be something that holds their attention and requires enough focus to get them into that state of 'flow' where they forget about everything else. They will feel more competent, accomplished and capable afterwards and these are great antidotes to low self esteem!
4. **Stop thinking about yourself!** Low self esteem is often accompanied by too much focus on the self. Doing something that absorbs a person attention can quickly make them feel better.
5. **Get seriously relaxed.** When a person is are feeling low, anxious or lacking in confidence, the first thing they should do is to stop thinking and relax properly. Some people do this by exercising, others by involving themselves in something that occupies their mind. However, being able to relax yourself when you want is a fantastic life skill and so practicing self hypnosis, meditation, or a physically-based



relaxation technique such as Tai Chi can be incredibly useful. When you are properly relaxed, your brain is less emotional and your memory for good events works better. A great 'rescue remedy'!

6. **Remember all the things you have achieved.** This can be difficult for some at first, but after a while, they will develop a handy mental list of self-esteem boosting memories. And if they say "But I've never achieved anything", tell them you are not talking about climbing Everest here. Things like passing their driving test (despite being nervous), passing exams (despite doubting that you would), playing team sport, getting fit (even if you let it slip later), saving money for something, trying to help someone (even if it didn't work) and so on.
7. **Lighten up! Learn to take yourself less seriously, no one likes to be around someone who is always down.** The only people it attracts are other who feel the same way - pity parties are not productive. Smile and accept that things may not always work out and there is a positive lesson to be learned from every experience.
8. **Remember that you could be wrong!** When you are feeling bad about yourself remember that the way you feel affects your thoughts, memory and behaviour. When you feel bad, you can only remember other bad times and this will lead you to become pessimistic about yourself and your future.
9. **Take up an exercise program to feel and look better.** Exercise energises the body and mind with happy endorphines.
10. **Decide to accept criticism in a constructive way so you can improve and develop.**
11. **Do not allow yourself to be limited by your internal image, learn to step outside of it and break free.** Your self-image doesn't have to control you or keep you down. Just acting differently will change how others see you and will also help to change your own attitudes towards yourself and your abilities.
12. **Decide to accept challenges positively.**
13. **Read motivating and inspiring books.**
14. **Realise that we are all limited only by our efforts and confidence!** Start believing in yourself!

## Female Confidence Destroyers

**Being a Doomsayer:** Some nerves are natural for both sexes, a new date or an important meeting will often cause a few feelings of anxiety, the trick is not to waste time negatively predicting the outcome.

**Don't Catastrophise!** When a woman thinks she does not look her best it's easy to feel that everything else will go badly as a result. The sure thing is that if she dwell on that single thought she will not enjoy the event.

**Negatively ruminating:** It goes like this... "What if she really meant...?" "I know that Debbie has invited us to their party, but I think she only invited us because she felt she had to?" Women tend to be more sensitive to others' needs, and more aware of changes that might improve a situation or make it more comfortable for someone. Unchecked however, this ability to think things over can turn into over-analysis and make life miserable as this internal process leads to confusion, anxiety and inaction.



## 7 Tips To Build Confidence

1. **Learn to relax.** When there is an event that naturally brings about a few butterflies, spend some time thinking about times that you have done well at something, remember what it is like to feel good, then take a few moments to imagine yourself with those feelings in the future.
2. **Notice how your posture, facial gestures and words feel and sound,** and what a difference it makes to the enjoyment of any event. If it is a meeting or public performance, remember that preparation and a belief in a positive outcome are key, even if we can't exactly predict the outcome we know that feeling relaxed releases the thinking part of the brain to get on with the job in hand to the best of our abilities.
3. **Realise that you decide if the shower will become a monsoon.** Just because one thing isn't as we would like it, it

doesn't follow that the rest of the day or evening is going to be awful. Women who appear confident don't let a bad hair day stop them from enjoying life.

4. **Make a list of the qualities that you have** and next time that you tell yourself that you look awful and that the evening is ruined before it has started, remind yourself that you can't see into the future. And of the other things that make a good party apart from a perfect hair do. A recent survey said that people who smile a lot are rated more attractive than those who don't.
5. **Develop an optimistic outlook.** Women are more likely to read more into facial gestures and voice intonation, this is a useful trait but sometimes we get it wrong. So before the miserable demons of 'ifs', 'whats' and 'maybes' get their teeth into your thought patterns, work on developing the power of optimism the tool that vanquishes negative mulling over of problems and allows the possibility of fun times ahead.
6. **Do something, don't brood.** One of the key skills of women who appear confident is the ability to notice that even if they are feeling a little nervous inside they take their attention to the world around them. No longer dwelling on the internal chatter, they can enjoy the people they are with, they may also notice that they don't have the longest legs or are not the liveliest woman in a room; but that is a fleeting thought and they carry on engaging and enjoying. Giving the people around top quality attention.... showing an interest makes them feel wonderful! They will remember it even if you spent a short time with them.

For women, contemplating thoughts and ideas can be a creative process that leads to beneficial actions, fun times and rewarding relationships. Taken too far however, it becomes a road to inaction and anxiety.

7. **Avoid paralysis by analysis.** To maximum self confidence, women need to avoid paralysis-by-analysis, so when opportunity strikes jump! Say, I'm going to take action! ... Mind you, on the other hand ... ;-)

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