

Prime Timer Focus

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Self Esteem and How It Is Developed

Self esteem can be defined in many ways, but basically it is the opinion you have of yourself, or: "The experience of being capable of meeting life's challenges and being worthy of happiness."

There are five main components to self esteem:

Trust – starts early in life and is based on how we are received into the world. We learn to trust ourselves and begin to have a realistic trust of others. We begin to develop confidence in the **self's** ability to choose others who are safe or who will not injure or exploit us.

Self Nurture – is born of trust. We learn how to take care of ourselves. Self nurturing is an essential ingredient of self esteem.

Autonomy – comes from mastery. We work through necessary dependencies to a growing independence. We find interdependence when we can separate ourselves from others around us and yet retain vital connections to others.

Identity grows – we begin to know who we are and who we are becoming. In each stage of life, self esteem undergoes change and growth. We feel more solid as our identity grows.

Intimacy – develops from identity and the need for connection. It is the ability to relate closely and to know the limits of closeness. We yearn to lose ourselves in love and yet we need to retain our own separate essence.

Healthy Self Esteem versus Poor Self Esteem:

Healthy self-esteem is based on our ability to assess ourselves accurately (know ourselves) and still be able to accept and to 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 reservations.

People 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 grade, etc.) can be temporary.

Where does self esteem come from?

Our self-esteem develops and evolves throughout our lives as we build an image of ourselves through our experiences with different people and activities. 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) and 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. Self-esteem is largely developed during childhood.

Childhood experiences that lead to healthy self-esteem include:

- being praised
- being listened to
- being spoken to respectfully
- getting attention and hugs
- experiencing success in sports or school having trustworthy friends

Childhood experiences that lead to low self-esteem include:

- 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.

What Does Your "Inner Voice" Say?

Our past experiences, even the things we don't usually think about, are all alive and active in our daily life in the form of an **Inner Voice**. Although most people do not "hear" this voice in the same way they would a spoken one, in many ways it acts in a similar way, constantly repeating those original messages to us. For people with healthy self-esteem the messages of the inner voice are positive and reassuring. For people with low self-esteem, the inner voice becomes a harsh inner critic, constantly criticizing, punishing, and belittling their accomplishments.

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 recognize. Here are three common faces that low self-esteem may wear:

The Impostor: acts happy and successful, but is really terrified of failure. Lives with the constant fear that she or he will be "found out." Needs continuous successes to maintain the mask of positive self-esteem, which may lead to problems with perfectionism, procrastination, competition, and burn-out.

The Rebel: acts like the opinions or good will of others - especially people who are important or powerful - don't matter. Lives with constant anger about not feeling "good enough." Continuously needs to prove that others' judgments and criticisms don't hurt, which may lead to problems like blaming others excessively, breaking rules or laws, or fighting authority.

The Loser: acts helpless and unable to cope with the world and waits for someone to come to the rescue. Uses self-pity or indifference as a shield against fear of taking responsibility for changing his or her life. Looks constantly to others for guidance, which can lead to such problems as lacking assertiveness skills, under-achievement, and excessive reliance on others in relationships.

Consequences of Low Self-Esteem:

Low self-esteem can have devastating consequences.

- It can create anxiety, stress, loneliness and increased likelihood for depression.
- It can cause problems with friendships and relationships.
- It can lead to underachievement and increased vulnerability to drug and alcohol abuse.
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Worst of all, these negative consequences themselves reinforce the negative self-image and can take a person into a downward spiral of lower and lower self-esteem and increasingly non-productive or even actively self-destructive behavior.

Three Steps to Better Self Esteem

Before you can begin to improve your self-esteem you must first believe that you can change it. Change doesn't necessarily happen quickly or easily, but it can happen. You are not powerless! Once you have accepted, or are at least willing to entertain the possibility that you are not powerless, there are three steps you can take to begin to change your self-esteem:

- Step 1: Rebut the Inner Critic
- Step 2: Practice Self-Nurturing
- Step 3: Get Help from Others

Step 1: Rebut the inner critic

The first important step in improving self-esteem is to begin to challenge the negative messages of the critical inner voice. Here are some typical examples of the inner critic's voice and how you can "rebut" that voice:

The Inner Critic's Voice:	Your Rebuttals:
Is Unfairly Harsh: "People said they liked my presentation, but it was nowhere near as good as it should have been. I can't believe no-one noticed all the places I messed up. I'm such an impostor."	Be Reassuring: "Wow, they really liked it! Maybe it wasn't perfect, but I worked hard on that presentation and did a good job. I'm proud of myself. This was a great success."

<p>Generalizes Unrealistically: "I got an F on the test. I don't understand anything in this class. I'm such an idiot. Who am I fooling? I shouldn't be taking this class. I'm stupid and I don't belong in college."</p>	<p>Be Specific: "I did poorly on this one test, but I've done O.K. on all the homework. There are some things here that I don't understand as well as I thought I did, but I can do the material-I've done fine in other classes that were just as tough."</p>
<p>Makes Leaps of Illogic: "He is frowning. He didn't say anything, but I know it means that he doesn't like me!"</p>	<p>Challenge Illogic: "O.K., he's frowning, but I don't know why. It could have nothing to do with me. Maybe I should ask."</p>
<p>Catastrophizes: "She turned me down for a date! I'm so embarrassed and humiliated. No one likes or cares about me. I'll never find a girlfriend. I'll always be alone."</p>	<p>Be Objective: "Ouch! That hurt. Well, she doesn't want to go out with me. That doesn't mean no one does. I know I'm an attractive and nice person. I'll find someone."</p>

Step 2: Practice Self-Nurturing

Rebutting your critical inner voice is an important first step, but it is not enough. Since our self-esteem is in part due to how others have treated us in the past, the second step to more healthy self-esteem is to begin to treat yourself as a worthwhile person.

Start to challenge past negative experiences or messages by nurturing and caring for yourself in ways that show that you are valuable, competent, deserving and lovable. There are several components to self-nurturing:

- **Practice Basic Self-Care** - Get enough sleep, eat in a healthy fashion, get regular exercise, practice good hygiene, and so forth.
- **Plan Fun & Relaxing Things For Yourself** - You could go to a movie, take a nap, get a massage, plant a garden, buy a pet, learn to meditate- whatever you enjoy.
- **Reward Yourself For Your Accomplishments** - You could take the night off to celebrate good grades, spend time with a friend, or compliment yourself for making that hard phone call.

- **Remind Yourself of Your Strengths & Achievements** - One way is to make a list of things you like about yourself. Or keep a 'success' file of awards, certificates and positive letters or citations. Keep momentos of accomplishments you are proud of where you can see them.
- **Forgive Yourself When You Don't Do All You'd Hoped** - Self-nurturing can be surprisingly hard if you are not used to doing it. Don't be critical of yourself-remember that inner voice!-when you don't do it just right.
- **Self-Nurture Even When You Don't Feel You Deserve It** - "Fake it" until you can "make it." When you treat yourself like you deserve to feel good and be nurtured, slowly you'll come to believe it.

Step 3: Get Help from Others

Getting help from others is often the most important step a person can take to improve his or her self-esteem, but it can also be the most difficult. People with low self-esteem often don't ask for help because they feel they don't deserve it. But since low self-esteem is often caused by how other people treated you in the past, you may need the help of other people in the present to challenge the critical messages that come from negative past experiences. Here are some ways to get help from others:

- **Ask for Support from Friends** - Ask friends to tell you what they like about you or think you do well; ask someone who cares about you to just listen to you "vent" for a little while without trying to "fix" things; ask for a hug; ask someone who loves you to remind you that they do.
- **Get Help from Teachers & Other Helpers** - Go to professors or advisors or tutors to ask for help in classes if this is a problem for you. **Remember:** They are there to help you learn! If you lack self-confidence in certain areas, take classes or try out new activities to increase your sense of competence (for example, take a math class, join a dance club, take swimming lessons, etc.)
- **Talk to a Therapist or Counselor** - Sometimes low self-esteem can feel so painful or difficult to overcome that the professional help of a therapist or counselor is needed. Talking to a counselor is a good way to learn more about your self-esteem issues and begin to improve your self-esteem.

Self Esteem Assessment

Determine if your self esteem is at a healthy level by completing this questionnaire,

Directions: Circle T if the statement is true for you. Circle F if the statement is false for you.

- T F** I am able to discuss my good points, skills, abilities, achievements, and successes with others.
- T F** I assert myself with someone whom I believe is violating or ignoring my rights.
- T F** I am content with who I am, how I act, and what I do in life.
- T F** I am not bothered by feelings of insecurity or anxiety when I meet people for the first time.
- T F** My life is balanced between work, family life, social life, recreation/leisure, and spiritual life.
- T F** I am aware of the roles I played in my family of origin and have usually been able to make these behavior patterns work for me in my current life.
- T F** I am bonded with the significant others in my environment at home, work, school, at play, or in the community.
- T F** I am satisfied with my level of achievement at school, work, home, and in the community.
- T F** I am a good problem solver; my thinking is not clouded by irrational beliefs or thoughts.

If you circled F for three or more of the statements listed above, you probably need to work at increasing your self esteem.

Community Tidbits

Job Hunting with Success for Adults with Physical Disabilities

- Workshop 1: Self-Discovery: Identifying your skills and strengths
• **Wednesday, May 23, 2007**
- Workshop 2: Preparing a strong Resume **Wednesday, May 30, 2007**
- Workshop 3: Communicating effectively with potential employers
• **Wednesday, June 6, 2007**
- Workshop 4: Conducting successful job searches **Wednesday, June 13, 2007**

Time: **11am to 2pm** (30 minutes lunch)

It is recommended that you attend all workshops as each workshop builds on the previous one. At the end of this series you will have acquired the basic hands-on knowledge for effectively looking for work.

Space is limited: maximum number is 5 individuals. Participants will be working one-on-one with the facilitator. To register you need to contact Constantine Iliopoulos at 416-690-8804 by Friday May 18, 2007. Attendant Care will be provided upon request. Lunch and refreshments will be available.

Location: Tobias House Resource Centre, 695 Coxwell Ave., (Coxwell and Danforth), 6th Floor.

Adult Interactive for People with Disabilities

You are invited to come and watch **'Stranger than Fiction'**

WHEN: **Thursday May 17, 2007 3:30pm - 7:00pm**

WHERE: ANNE JOHNSTON HEALTH STATION

COST: \$2.00

A HEALTHY SNACKING WILL BE PROVIDED!

To RSVP, please call Constantine at 416-690-8804 by Monday May 14, 2007.

Attendant care will be available until 7:30!

The Barbra Shlifer Commemorative Clinic's 13th Annual "Tribute" Fundraiser

Wednesday, June 13, 2007

You are invited to a special fundraising evening of music, food and celebration, including hors d'oeuvres, complimentary cocktail, prizes and our famous Silent Auction!

Proceeds will support the Clinic's programs and services for women survivors of violence in our community.

NEW LOCATION: At the C Lounge, 456 Wellington Street West

- Doors Open at 6:00 p.m.
- Silent Auction Ends at 9:30 p.m.
- Tickets \$45.00

To order tickets please call (416) 323-9149 Ext. 237 or on-line at www.shliferclinic.com.