

Counselling &
Learning Support
North Vancouver Campus

Developing Positive Self-Esteem



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Developing Positive Self-Esteem

What is self-esteem?

- The degree to which you value yourself.
- Your thoughts and feelings about yourself and your place in the world.

Self-confidence, self-respect, self-acceptance and self-love are all elements of self-esteem. There are two basic components of self-esteem:

- a) Feelings of **personal competence** – feeling able to accomplish and succeed in tasks, school, work, sports, etc.
- b) Feelings of **personal worth** – feeling worthy of love and friendship.

A balance of these two components is needed for healthy self-esteem.

Why is healthy self-esteem important?

Your level of self-esteem influences all aspects of your life: your happiness, your health, your relationships and your success in school, work and leisure activities. Healthy self-esteem allows you to feel relaxed, capable, lovable and at ease in relationships. Low self-esteem can make you feel worthless, anxious, incompetent and unlovable.

What influences your level of self-esteem?

Many factors can influence the development of one's self-esteem. Early experiences play an important role in how a person feels about him or herself. Your successes and failures along with how you were treated by the significant people in your life create the foundation for self-esteem.

Some types of early experiences that help to build healthy self-esteem are:

- being valued, respected and cared for
- being encouraged and supported in our efforts
- experiencing success in school, sports or other activities
- having positive relationships with family and friends

Some experiences that can hinder one's self-esteem are:

- not being accepted for who we are
- being criticized or ridiculed regularly
- being ignored, bullied or picked on for being different in some way
- experiencing failures in school or other activities
- having too high expectations placed on us

Characteristics of people with healthy self-esteem	Characteristics of people with unhealthy self-esteem
1. They feel good about themselves . They have self-love, self-respect & self-confidence.	1. They have negative feelings about themselves . They don't like themselves and they feel unlovable and incompetent. They often feel as if they are not good enough.
2. They have a positive attitude about life . They are optimistic and hopeful. They use positive self-talk.	2. They have a pessimistic, negative attitude about life . They expect bad things to happen and they use negative self-talk.
3. They feel capable of meeting life's challenges . They don't expect to be perfect and they are not crushed by failures. Rather, they see mistakes as learning experiences and they are willing to take risks.	3. They are reluctant to take risks for fear of failing . They perceive mistakes as crushing defeats rather than opportunities to learn.
4. Their self-esteem does not depend on external circumstances ; it stems from within. Their feelings about themselves are not dependent on others' opinions & they don't spend a lot of time comparing themselves to other people.	4. They need the approval and praise of others to feel good about themselves. They often compare themselves with others and they have difficulty resisting social pressures.
5. They are comfortable in their relationships with others . They respect their own rights and the rights of others . They can be assertive as well as compassionate, accepting and understanding of others.	5. They often feel isolated and disconnected from others .
6. They have a sense of harmony and peace within and with the world.	6. They have difficulty connecting with their inner selves . They may not have a high level of self-awareness.

Self-Esteem and Self-Talk

There is a close relationship between our inner voice and our self-esteem. All of us have a continuous inner dialogue that takes place whether we are aware of it or not. What you believe and say about yourself and about the world influences how you feel about yourself. Self-talk can be positive and encouraging or it can be critical and self-blaming.

People with low self-esteem often have negative self-talk. Their inner dialogue is made up of a lot of self-criticism, blaming and complaining.

Our self-talk is usually rooted in our past experiences and the messages we received about ourselves from significant others. These original messages become internalized and they continue to influence how we feel about ourselves.

For example, if you grew up in a family in which you were supported, valued and encouraged, you are likely to have positive self-talk and positive expectations of success. On the other hand, if you were regularly criticized or ignored or were surrounded by people who have very negative views about life, you may have the following types of beliefs:

- “I can never do anything right.”
- “Nothing good will ever happen to me.”
- “I’m not important, no one cares about me.”
- “The world is a dangerous place.”
- “I’m a loser.”

The problem with these types of thoughts is that they lead to self-defeating behaviours which in turn cause us to feel worse about ourselves. It is a vicious negative cycle.

What you can do to Develop Positive Self-Esteem

First, remember, self-esteem is not a static thing. It can be improved. Once you understand how low self-esteem is often the result of being “stuck” in a certain way of thinking, you can begin to make changes.

The following strategies can all be helpful in developing positive self-esteem:

1. **Increase your self-awareness.** Take time to get to know the real you. Ask yourself: What do I value? How do I want to live my life? What brings me satisfaction? What makes me unhappy? What changes do I want to make in my life?
2. **Understand what has influenced your level of self-esteem.** Where did your negative beliefs come from? What patterns have you developed to maintain a negative self-concept? Identify the ways in which you may be sabotaging your positive sense of self.

3. **Focus on your strengths.** We all have both strengths and weaknesses but many people with low self-esteem tend to focus only on their weaknesses. You have many good qualities and talents. Notice them and find ways to develop them. By recognizing your strengths and focusing on the positive aspects of life, you will begin to feel better.
4. **Allow yourself to make mistakes.** No one is perfect. If we expect ourselves to be perfect, we will never succeed. Making mistakes is part of learning and growing. Without taking risks and trying new things, we cannot achieve our full potential.
5. **Use positive self-talk.** Many people allow negative thoughts to keep them stuck and feeling bad about themselves. You, alone, have control over your thoughts. You can choose to focus on either the negative or the positive aspects of yourself. By choosing to develop a positive mental attitude you will open the door to positive experiences and outcomes. Remember our actions usually follow our thoughts.
6. **Put yourself into situations in which you will do well.** Try to do at least one thing everyday that you are good at. By doing things that we are good at, we build up our confidence. Having confidence in one aspect of our life can help us to take risks in new areas. Taking risks helps us to grow and feel more confident about meeting life's challenges.
7. **Develop relationships with people who are supportive.** Being with people who are positive and accepting helps us to recognize our positive qualities. Avoid people who put you down or only focus on negatives; these people reinforce your negative views and make it difficult for you to initiate positive changes in your life.
8. **Start with small goals.** Changing a negative self-concept may take time. Do not get discouraged if you do not see big changes happening quickly. Start with one aspect of your life that you want to change and set small goals that you can continue to build upon.

Need More Information?

If you want to meet with a counsellor to learn more about what you can do to develop your self-esteem, please contact Counselling & Learning Support in Birch 267 or phone 604.984.1744.