

About self-esteem



About self-esteem

Kia ora.

Self-esteem is all about the way we feel about ourselves. Self-esteem is really important for our wellbeing because the level of self-esteem and self-respect we have has a powerful impact on:

- how we see ourselves
- the way we respond to people around us
- the things we think about and focus on, and
- the way we behave.

When we have healthy self-esteem we tend to:

- like and accept ourself (warts and all!)
- see ourself in a more flexible, balanced way
- have more stable emotions and moods
- find it easier to be assertive (are able to say what they want, feel, or think)
- don't try to please others at our own expense
- be better able to re-assurane ourself without having to rely on others opinions
- not let ourself be mistreated by others.

On the other hand, when our self-esteem is low we:

- may struggle to like ourself
- tend to focus on and make bigger our faults, and ignore our strengths and achievements (putting ourself down)
- are more likely to feel sad, worried, and unhappy
- may act in an unassertive way (not saying what we want, feel, or think)
- may try to please others at our own expense
- may feel uncomfortable and worry about what others think
- may seek re-assurance from others, not trusting our own opinions
- may allow ourself to be mistreated by others, which can sadly confirm any belief we may hold that we are not good enough.

The vicious cycle of low self-esteem

Low self-esteem can become a vicious cycle. If we don't feel okay, we're more likely to withdraw or seek lots of reassurance from others. Other people then pick up on this, and may begin to act differently towards us in return. This can lead to us feeling worse, confirming our (inaccurate) belief that we are not very likeable.

But the great news is, we can create new cycles of thoughts and behaviours that help us build good self-esteem so we feel better in relationships and in ourselves.

Four steps to start building a healthier self-esteem

Step 1: Catch yourself being self-critical or self-doubting

It's really important to become aware of our inner critic. We all have one and it can sometimes help remind us to do things, but that critical voice can also become hurtful, unhelpful, and wrong. It may tell us others are only being nice because they want something, or may make us doubt our own abilities.

It's important to notice when our inner critic shows up. We're usually self-critical when we're doing something new or important, and at these times it's more helpful to be self-supportive and see things in a balanced way. Noticing when we are being self-critical gives us the chance to change the way we are approaching ourselves.

Step 2: Fight the inner critic by challenging your negative thoughts and beliefs

After you catch yourself having self-critical, negative thoughts, you can start to challenge them using the tips outlined in the Lessons. Remember, negative thoughts are often inaccurate and based more on how we feel, rather than what is really happening.

Some people often use difficult childhood events or relationships as evidence that they are unlovable or unintelligent or worthless. 'Thought challenging' and 'evidence gathering' can be used for challenging these beliefs too, helping us see these events and ourselves in a more balanced way.

Ask yourself questions like:

- Are there any other reasons (other than I am unlovable/ worthless unattractive) that may explain why that happened in my life?
- Do similar things happen to others, and does that mean they are unlovable?
- Am I only focusing on the evidence which fits with this negative belief about myself?
- What have I done in the past that provides evidence that does not support this negative belief?
- If someone I loved had these beliefs about themselves, what would I say to them?
- If someone I loved knew I had these beliefs, what would they say to me?

Write down your answers to the questions above.

It might feel strange at first, but this is an important step in starting to build your self-esteem and starting to fight your inner critic.

2. Reduce 'avoidance' behaviour

People with low self-esteem often avoid situations because they lack confidence. But, as you know, avoidance can make you feel worse about yourself. Facing situations you've been avoiding that trigger anxiety is difficult. It can be hard to start talking about yourself in conversations, or become open to a romantic relationship.

But you can use the same skills you learnt for facing other fearful situations. Give yourself little tasks that you would have previously avoided, and test out whether your belief about yourself is true. Take it slowly, praise your efforts and you'll get there.

3. Take your time and have realistic expectations

Negative beliefs can be hard to shift. But, they can be changed with gradual and consistent practice.

For example, a belief such as "I am worthless" won't just change overnight. Negative beliefs change gradually over time as we work on them. Aim to reduce how much you believe the thought (e.g. 100% down to 70%), or how often you have it.

Even making a small shift of 10% in the amount you believe the thought can help give you confidence, helping you gain evidence that further shifts your negative belief about yourself.

Summary

Good self-esteem is essential to our wellbeing. Without healthy self-esteem we get stuck believing our inner critic and start to focus on the negatives, rather than being able to see ourselves and situations in a balanced way.

You can work on your self-esteem by trying the skills you have used in other parts of this course.

Good self-esteem involves building positive habits of thinking and acting into your life. These habits help us enjoy life more and improve our moods!

Take care,

The Just a Thought Team

www.justathought.co.nz