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What is Self-Esteem?

The terms self-esteem and self-confidence will be used interchangeably throughout this eBook. To create healthy relationships, it is important to understand what self-esteem is so you know where to start – and where you may be stuck.

Self-esteem is:

- The ability to love and accept yourself, mistakes and all
- Feeling love from others and not rejecting it
- Taking care of yourself physically, emotionally and spiritually without delay

According to Dr. Joe Rubino, author of *The Self-Esteem Book*, 85 percent of the world's population is affected by low self-esteem. So if you struggle with self-esteem, you are not alone.

Low self-esteem impacts your ability to:

- Be assertive in communication
- Handle conflict
- Feel adequate in social situations
- Ask for promotions at work
- Get your needs met in relationship
- Practice consistent self care
- Parent with respect not abuse

As a result, you may avoid asking for what you need in relationships because you feel “less than.” You may assume the answer is no because you think you don't deserve it.

Factors Linked With Low Self-Esteem

There are many factors that affect self-esteem. Here are some you may have experienced:

- Child abuse or neglect
- Depression
- Feeling anxious
- Addictions
- Feeling like you don't belong
- Trauma
- Obesity
- Dysfunctional and broken relationships
- Gang involvement and violent behavior
- Low academic achievement and school drop out rates
- Teen pregnancy

Low self-esteem contributes to depression because when you don't like yourself it clouds your outlook on life. "You're not enough" is a common theme.

Your confidence also plays a significant role in picking friends and spouses. If you don't feel good about yourself, your partners will reflect that. *Building your confidence will help you pick healthier people.*

Healthy Boundaries

It starts with setting boundaries. These are limits you set for yourself. It's choosing what you participate in and asking for what you need. It's not about the other person's behavior.

Without a healthy sense of self, knowing what you need and setting the

appropriate limits is a constant struggle.

As a result, you may end up in abusive relationships. When you have more confidence, setting boundaries gets easier because you know that your needs are valid.

Here, you'll learn the key factors contributing to low self-esteem and how to change them. You don't have to continue to suffer; there is a solution.

When you have self-confidence it shows in:

- The type of relationships you attract
- The ability to communicate and handle conflict
- Setting appropriate boundaries
- Career and life satisfaction
- Healthy parenting
- The ability to end unhealthy relationships

Building a Solid Foundation

Many of us learned to base self-esteem on external things like financial success, marital status and job performance. These things don't last and can change without warning.

Building a solid foundation means starting from the inside out. It's discovering what you like about yourself instead of relying on outside sources. The goal is accepting yourself for being perfectly imperfect.

The Impact of Childhood

Many of us grew up with childhood messages that contributed to developing low self-esteem like:

- Childhood abuse, neglect or trauma
- Role models with low self-esteem
- Negative or critical comments from authority figures
- Being negatively compared to others
- Little contact with either or both parents
- Families with addiction, mental illness or difficult personalities
- Invalidating children's emotional experiences

Years ago, self-esteem wasn't considered an important part of a child's development. Today, it is considered a vital part of healthy role modeling.

In your family growing up...

- *Was being confident looked down upon?*
- *Were accomplishments celebrated regularly?*
- *Did the adults acknowledge their successes without acting superior?*
- *Was it okay to stand out and be special?*

Children need constant reassurance and positive feedback in order to develop a healthy sense of self. As teenagers, they need encouragement and praise for who they are and their unique talents.

If you had negative or critical messages as a child, those messages likely influenced the way you saw yourself. You may have felt different from the other kids or that you didn't measure up.

As an adult these negative thoughts can affect your relationships, work

and the ability to enjoy life.

These feelings can become part of your identity. The section below includes the essential tips for building your confidence.

Four Tips to Build Your Confidence

1. Change Your Thinking

Negative thinking is a habit that can be unlearned by practicing affirmations. How you think influences your mood, so pay attention. Self-talk plays a large part in having low self-esteem.

Find the positive in you. Positive affirmations are “I” statements that directly counteract the negative messages in your head. Research shows that affirmations written in the present tense – as if they are already happening – are the most effective.

Find positive statements that are *true for you*. This might feel strange at first. Start with compliments you’ve heard from family and friends.

Exercise

Try this: Write down a list of 10 negative or critical thoughts you have about yourself. Then change each negative thought into a positive thought.

For example: “I’m worthless” changes to “I’m enough.”

2. Making Peace with the Past

In 12-step programs, writing a personal inventory of strengths and weaknesses helps people understand themselves in a new light.

By examining your behavior you are able to “change the things you can.” As a result, a sense of integrity develops. This creates the opportunity for growth and change.

Writing Exercise

This exercise originated from Alcoholics Anonymous. It targets past hurts and resentments that can create problems in your relationships. It provides a method to express your private thoughts and feelings without judgment.

There are no wrong feelings, and understanding their purpose can be incredibly healing. Here are the steps.

1. Write a list of resentments and fears. Tell the story of what happened and how it relates to self-esteem.
2. List how these fears and resentments affect you today. Write out how each one has negatively impacted you.

Examples affected by resentment and fear:

- Work performance
- Relationships
- Financial security
- Pride
- Personal safety and security
- Sexual relationships
- Parenting
- Ability to make decisions and take risks
- Self-esteem
- Asking for what you need and want
- Ability to feel joy and satisfaction

3. Next, write how your behavior contributed to the fear and/or resentment. Include your reactions, thoughts, and emotions. List how that behavior impacted the outcome. *This is the only part you have control over and where you can learn the most about yourself.*
4. Look for the patterns of behavior. Has this resentment or fear happened before? Write out the situations where this pattern has shown up. Trace these back to childhood if you can.

Example of a Resentment

Resentment - You resent your partner for criticizing you.

Affects - It affects your ability to trust and feel safe.

Pattern - As a child, you kept quiet and didn't express hurt.

Your part - You didn't tell your partner how you felt and as a result, it created distance in the relationship.

This exercise will shed light on your behavior and start the growth process. By expressing these feelings and *taking responsibility for them you begin to let them go and rebuild your confidence.*

Facing the past creates an opportunity to let it go and forgive. It builds empathy towards those you resent because understanding your part changes your perspective.

It is important to note that if writing about childhood abuse, "your part" should be left blank. There is **no personal responsibility** in abuse suffered.

The emotional healing that comes from this exercise can relieve depression and anxiety as you courageously examine yourself,

face the pain and move on. If there is unresolved trauma, seeking professional help may be helpful.

3. Self-Care is a Priority

An important part of building self-esteem is practicing consistent self-care and not expecting others to take care of you. These skills are simple, but not easy, especially if they were not modeled for you as a child.

Aspects of self-care:

- Physical needs, such as adequate sleep, healthy food, regular exercise, affection and sex
- Emotional needs, such as closeness, friendship and support
- Spiritual needs, such as hope and faith in a higher power

Start physically by getting enough sleep, healthy food and exercise. These simple tasks can greatly improve your mood because if you're out of balance physically, your emotions will be too.

There may be old beliefs about what it means to focus on self. You might have learned that self-care is selfish. Putting others first was expected.

In fact, you may be better at taking care of others than yourself. Caretaking was a way to get noticed or receive love.

When you make self-care a priority, you no longer expect others to do it for you. Taking responsibility for your needs is empowering and as a result, relationships become healthier.

Handling positive change

When you start to change these old patterns, it can be uncomfortable at first. Family and friends may want you to stay the same.

Getting emotionally healthy can threaten those who fear change. Just remember that you're making positive changes for a better life.

If your loved ones are committed to the relationship, they will eventually accept these changes. If not, the relationship will fade. Some relationships don't survive healthy change.

The ultimate goal here is to practice self-care while still being able to give to others. The difference is *you will no longer give to others at your own expense.*

Start paying attention to your wants and needs. Practice making small changes like speaking up and asking for what you want.

Identify and explore what you like to do. As you begin, listen to your wants and start fulfilling them.

You'll be amazed at the joy and relief you feel. It's okay to have needs. It doesn't have to be all or nothing!

4. Accepting Love

Accepting love in your life is the last part of developing healthy self-esteem. If you can't feel the love others have for you, you may feel empty and disconnected. You may think you don't deserve to be loved.

Here's a quick way to test this: When someone you love gives you a compliment or expresses love, can you let it in or do you secretly reject it?

Tips for accepting love:

- Let yourself feel the love people have for you.
- Notice where you feel that love in your body.
- Address your negative beliefs.
- Do the things you love. It increases happiness.
- Accept compliments and acknowledge your gifts.
- Write a letter of forgiveness to yourself.

Working to improve self-esteem takes time and effort. Be gentle with yourself. Take one new skill and practice it, one behavior at a time. Before you know it, you'll notice that you're feeling more confident and accepting of yourself.

12-step programs have a saying, "act as if." This means acting as if you already have the skill you lack. Eventually, the feelings will follow. It's one day at a time. You can do it!

There is Hope

As you begin to understand how the past impacts your confidence, the puzzle pieces start to make sense. Understanding what's gotten in the way and taking responsibility for your contribution starts the healing.

By practicing these tools, self-esteem improves as you speak up for yourself. You don't have to remain stuck in your old beliefs. You can create something better.

I've helped my clients improve their self-confidence by providing gentle guidance and support to make these small but significant changes.

This can transform the way you interact with others. When you feel confident, you don't settle for less.

Feel free to call or text me at (408) 800-5736 today for a free phone consultation. You can have the life you want!