

Pathways to self-esteem

The way you feel about yourself is called your self-image. The more positive feelings you have about yourself, the higher your self-esteem. Feeling good about yourself is not snobbishness; it is a sense of your own worth. Self-esteem develops over time, constantly changing with experience. Thus, no single person or event should determine your level of self-worth

Self-esteem affects daily life.

Self-esteem affects the way you live and how you think, act and feel about yourself and others. Generally, with high self-esteem you may feel effective, productive, capable and lovable. If you have low self-esteem, you may feel ineffective, worthless, incompetent and unloved. Feeling good about yourself enables you to accept challenges, enrich your life, maintain self-confidence and offer more of yourself to the world.

Low self-esteem has been blamed for a host of problems. It can be a vague off-and-on case of the blues, a sense of feeling “blah” or perhaps a state of mild depression that all of us experience at one time or another. A person with low self-esteem may lack confidence, may not work to reach goals, may have a distorted view of himself or herself, and may have an unhappy personal life.

Such negative feelings can lead to negative actions, which can increase the likelihood that stressful events will occur. On the other hand, positive thinking can produce feelings of confidence and skill. These feelings increase the likelihood of appropriate action and thus decrease the chance that stressful events will occur. Most of us contribute to our own stress by thinking negatively. Fortunately, with some work, self-esteem can be improved.

Improving self-esteem is not always easy. It means taking a hard look at yourself and changing the things you don't like. This takes time, but the results will be well worth the effort. By working to raise your self-esteem, you can set in motion a process that changes your self-concept.

Try this to raise your self-esteem

- **List your good points.** You may already be aware of your flaws, but people with low self-esteem often ignore their strong characteristics. Write down how you think another person, who know and likes you, might describe your strong points. See yourself from someone else's perspective.
- **Shape yourself in your own ideal image.** You can move closer to your ideal self if you use the “act as if” approach. Act as if you are the way you want to be.
- **Develop mastery in areas you already do well.** These don't need to be complex or difficult. In fact, you may do them every day and take them for granted.
- **List your accomplishments.** Most likely you will be less critical of yourself once you find out that you simply don't have time for everything.
- **Recognize what makes you special.** Reflect on some aspect of your personality that is distinctive or unique.
- **Do the most with what you have.** One of the best self-esteem builders is making you look and feel as attractive as possible. Please yourself, not others.
- **Become more interesting.** Be more interested in people, places and things. There's a lot to learn, which will help you feel more alive and bring you into contact with new people.
- **Accept you.** Learn to respect and trust your feelings. “Talk” to yourself to provide encouragement and praise to tackle difficult situations. Plan time for yourself, feel confident in seeking help.

If you need help...

If you've tried to build your self-esteem but aren't making any progress, you can discuss your feelings with a friend, relative, family doctor or member of the clergy. Or talk to a counselor, whose objective viewpoint can put things in perspective. To make an appointment, call (810) 257-3740. In an emergency, call Crisis Services at (810) 257-3740, where a counselor is available 24 hours a day.

www.genhs.org ©