

IMPROVING YOUR SELF-ESTEEM

Self-esteem impacts the way that we make decisions, navigate relationships, and stay motivated. The good news is that self-esteem is not set in stone, it can be improved.

Self-esteem is the **confidence that you hold in your own worth and abilities**. As with most things in life, there is a balance. Too little, or low, self-esteem negatively impacts mental health, relationships, willingness to pursue new opportunities, and many other situations. Too much, or excessive, self-esteem can create a sense of entitlement that is not received well by peers. Ideally, you want to have a healthy amount of self-esteem.

WHERE DOES SELF-ESTEEM COME FROM?

Two people who look the same and have the exact same accomplishments could have completely different views about their worth and abilities. **That is because self-esteem is not based solely on who you are, but it is based on what you prioritize and believe is important in life.** For example, if being smart is one of your priorities, you may value and feel proud of yourself when you do well on a test. If you value social status more than being smart, then doing well on a test may not impact your self-esteem at all.

Some of this can stem from life experiences, as nobody encounters all of the exact same situations. This is much like the **core beliefs** that you hold about yourself. Additionally, any and all relationships that you have, starting in childhood, can impact self-esteem. For example, if the people close to you, such as parents or siblings, have conveyed positive messages to you about yourself over the years, you likely have higher self-esteem than

someone who did not receive that growing up. Similarly, if you are criticized or devalued by peers or significant others often, your self-esteem will be negatively impacted. **Self-esteem is everchanging.** For instance, if you grew up in a home where positive messages were communicated, it's still possible to encounter situations or develop cognitive distortions that decrease your self-esteem. On the other hand, if you grew up in an environment that perpetuated low self-esteem, you can improve your self-esteem.



BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM

Building up self-esteem can be extremely difficult for someone with low self-esteem. It's important to remain patient with yourself as you try to notice and pay more attention to the things you like about yourself. As you start to work on your self-esteem, try to understand what you are prioritizing. Then ask yourself: **are these the priorities that I truly want to focus on?** For example, you might be able to recognize that you prioritize being a certain size, even if you have to sacrifice your happiness. You can also begin to wonder if you are being fair with yourself. For example, try to recognize areas where you are holding yourself to impossibly



high standards, or when you are judging yourself for something you would never judge somebody else on. **Take time to recognize what you are good at and ask yourself why you don't consider those things when you think about your self-worth.** Show yourself patience while you work to build up your self-esteem. The worksheet below will help you work through some of these questions. See the example below for guidance if you need help getting started.

WHY HEALTHY SELF-ESTEEM IS IMPORTANT

When you have a healthy amount of self-esteem, you believe in your own abilities and are more likely to try new things. This leads to personal and professional growth, achieving goals, and an increase in confidence and feelings of worthiness. Healthy self-esteem positively impacts almost every area of your life.

BENEFITS OF HEALTHY SELF-ESTEEM

- Can make decisions with confidence
- Able to state needs and set boundaries
- Can form and maintain healthy relationships
- Able to leave unhealthy relationships and friendships
- Can bounce back from mistakes
- Capable of navigating stress
- Able to receive feedback

ISSUES WITH LOW SELF-ESTEEM

- Finds it difficult to make decisions
- Unable to set boundaries
- Feels inferior to others
- Experiences fear and self-doubt
- Has a negative outlook on life
- Difficulty accepting positive feedback
- Has a lack of confidence
- Can lead to mental health disorders such as anxiety or depression.

WORKSHEET: IMPROVING YOUR SELF-ESTEEM

In this worksheet you will identify your priorities, evaluate your current strategies, remind yourself of what you are good at.

EXAMPLE

IDENTIFY YOUR PRIORITIES

In the space below, identify what you hold to be most important to you and your life.

I want to be a perfect student.

ARE THESE THE PRIORITIES YOU WANT TO FOCUS ON?

Spend time reflecting on whether the priorities you identified above are what you want to be focusing on.

Yes, being a perfect student will set me up for success in my career and opportunities down the line.

ARE YOU HOLDING YOURSELF TO AN IMPOSSIBLY HIGH STANDARD?

Do you judge yourself more harshly than you do others?

Yes. Nobody is perfect. I can be a high-achieving student and still make mistakes sometimes. The scholars that I look up to have made mistakes.

WHAT ARE YOU GOOD AT?

Now list at least three things you are good at or that make you proud of yourself.

- 1. I am good at organizing all of my responsibilities and assignments.*
- 2. I am good at budgeting my time to allow for studying AND social activities.*
- 3. I am good at helping others, including tutoring other students.*

EXAMPLE 2

IDENTIFY YOUR PRIORITIES

In the space below, identify what you hold to be most important to you and your life.

Being thin and attractive no matter what.

ARE THESE THE PRIORITIES YOU WANT TO FOCUS ON?

Spend time reflecting on whether the priorities you identified above are what you want to be focusing on.

No, sometimes I would rather do things without stressing about calories or dieting. I feel like I miss out on fun memories with friends and family at times.

ARE YOU HOLDING YOURSELF TO AN IMPOSSIBLY HIGH STANDARD?

Do you judge yourself more harshly than you do others?

Yes. I don't view my friends as less than when they eat "junk" food or skip a workout. I also compare myself to photos of people on social media, which may be edited or the result of plastic surgeries.

WHAT ARE YOU GOOD AT?

Now list at least three things you are good at or that make you proud of yourself.

- 1. I am good at running long distances*
- 2. I am good at cooking, even though I have stopped recently to avoid eating my food.*
- 3. I am good at accessorizing my outfits and often receive compliments on my fashion.*

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