Improving self-esteem

Self-esteem is having respect or confidence in yourself and how you interpret your abilities, appearance and/or attributes. It reflects an overall sense of value or worth, and affects our thoughts, feelings and behaviors. Often words such as self-worth, self-image and self-respect are used interchangeably with self-esteem. In short, a healthy self-esteem accepts and values you exactly for who you are, even your flaws.

Self-esteem impacts every area of our lives, including our mental and emotional health and how we operate at work and in relationships. Your level of self-esteem also varies throughout different stages of life. If high school was a particularly difficult period of your life, your self-image may have been lower than it is now. Perhaps getting older is causing lower self-esteem than how you once viewed yourself. Our self-perception is often linked with how others have treated us in the past. We might make past or current judgments about ourselves based on those experiences.

Along the spectrum of self-esteem, some people have a high sense of self-worth. Others find they have very low self-esteem, possibly facing symptoms of depression or anxiety. Feeling inadequate, unlovable and/or unworthy may accompany a lower self-image. If you find yourself on the low end of the self-image spectrum, it is important to remember you are not alone. This could be a symptom of depression, and your doctor or mental health professional can help.

Determining self-esteem levels

There are some useful ways to determine where your self-esteem levels are. Consider these possibilities:

- **Strengths and weaknesses** – Take inventory by writing down your positive and negative qualities. If your negative qualities largely outnumber the positives ones, this might be an indicator of low self-esteem.
- **Success and failure** – Do you downplay or explain away your successes? Many times we set perfection as the goal, only to be regularly disappointed. Are you able to receive compliments, or do you merely brush them aside? Being able to celebrate our accomplishments is a sign of a healthy self-esteem.
- **Standards** – Are you comparing yourself to others? This will not help improve your self-esteem. Research shows people who spend too much time on social media are more likely to struggle with low self-esteem because they are constantly comparing themselves to others.
- **Potential** – Have you considered you may not know everything about yourself? Take some time to discover what hidden strengths and passions you might have. Exploring a new hobby, activity or talent may significantly increase your self-esteem.

Improving self-esteem

If you are looking to better your self-image, here are several practical steps to follow as you take inventory of your thoughts:

1. **Triggers** – Identify what or who triggers negative thinking. A difficult coworker? Looking at your bank account? Interactions with certain family members? You can’t avoid every trigger, but you can plan how you will respond to it.
2. **Self-talk** – Next, listen to your thinking, or “self-talk.” What do you tell yourself? Is it based on fact or emotion? Is it rational or irrational? Assuming the worst in every situation will take a toll on your self-esteem.

continued on Page 2
3. **Accuracy** – Are your thoughts true? If not, challenge them. Oftentimes our thoughts are influenced more by perception than reality.

- Black-and-white thinking – “If I don’t get this promotion, I might as well quit; jobs never work out for me.”
- Jumping to conclusions – “He hasn’t contacted me because he doesn’t like me.”
- Downplaying the positive – “She only asked me to go out because all her other friends were busy.”
- Overgeneralizing – “I never get things right. I’m always so stupid.”

4. **Positivity** - Replace negative thoughts with positive ones. Encourage yourself by focusing on the positive. Avoid thinking of “should have” and “could have” scenarios. When mistakes are made, you can learn to forgive yourself. Give yourself credit for good things and even small wins.

### Maintaining confidence in the workplace

Whether it’s due to stressful deadlines or personal challenges, many people find that they lose confidence in their abilities from time to time. Ironically, it’s at these times of high stress that you need your confidence and self-esteem the most. While you can’t always avoid stress, maintaining your confidence can help you battle and overcome it.

#### Why confidence is important

A positive self-image is something that you carry with you to every area of your life. Experts note that by having confidence in yourself, you establish a standard of how you should be treated, meaning that when others see that you treat yourself with respect, they will do the same. Here are a just a few ways that self-confidence can help you in the workplace:

- You maintain perspective. With low self-esteem, it’s easy to take on too much responsibility for problems that are unrelated to you. For example, you believe that every mistake in a project or of your team is a fault of your own. With good self-esteem you are able to separate yourself from the problem.
- You set healthy limits. By knowing and accepting yourself for who you are, you set healthy limits for what you can and cannot do. Some individuals with low self-esteem admit that they are unhappy with who they are and are constantly trying to prove themselves, thus setting unhealthy boundaries. This results in taking on projects even when you don’t have the time or the skills. The other extreme also occurs. A person may refuse to challenge himself/herself for fear of failure and consequently never grows. With healthy limits, you make better choices for you and for the workplace.
- You are proactive, not reactive. Rather than focusing on what “should have” and “could have” occurred in the past, you are more inclined to be proactive, thinking of what you have learned rather than what

### Taking care of yourself

Learning to change how you interpret life takes energy. Taking time every day to care for yourself will help you feel healthy, and when you feel good you are more likely to be positive about yourself and your abilities. Listen to your body, get plenty of sleep, eat healthy and exercise regularly. Take time for activities and people you enjoy most. A simple way to enjoy life and stay positive is to help someone else.

Rearranging your thoughts and learning to take care of your body takes time and practice. The more you challenge your negative thoughts and habits, the more confident you will feel in yourself and your actions. When you are positive about yourself, you will have a positive effect on the world around you.

**Sources:**

By © Amplified Life Media. Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved.
you did wrong. This “problem-solving” and “can do” attitude is a valuable asset for employees and employers.

- You create a positive work environment. Having confidence in yourself also translates into a positive attitude overall which benefits the entire workplace. When you have respect for yourself, you also have respect for others.

**Ways to nurture and maintain your confidence**

By adopting just a few changes in your lifestyle, you can nurture and maintain your confidence. Remember that self-confidence doesn’t just happen overnight, it is a gradual and ongoing process. Here are a few things you can do to affirm yourself.

- **Practice good time management.** It is easy to feel down about yourself when you are always running from one place to the next or pushing the deadline. Feeling like you are in control is an essential part of confidence.

- **Assign yourself.** Though many workplaces have special programs to celebrate and affirm their employees, you can’t wait for others to remind you of your talents. Take time every day to consider all you have accomplished, whether it’s the day-to-day tasks of your job or maintaining a positive attitude. Make a list of the day’s accomplishments or things you are proud of before you leave work or go to bed at night.

- **Take care of yourself.** When things get stressful, don’t neglect what you need, whether it’s taking a 10-minute walk or watching your favorite movie. When you’re exhausted and stressed, you may not be thinking rationally which may lead to negative self-talk.

- **Know that you are more than what you do.** Although you spend the majority of the day at work, it is only one piece of who you are. Focusing solely on your work identity may set you up for hard times and low confidence when the inevitable bad day comes. It’s important to remember and reflect on your many other talents outside the workplace.

**Conclusion**

Self-confidence is essential for leading a healthy and balanced life. Unfortunately with many of life’s stressors, it’s easy to get stuck thinking about what you aren’t doing rather than what you are doing. Take a little time each day to affirm yourself and nurture your self-esteem.

By © liveandworkwell.com. All rights reserved.

---

**Self-esteem: Take steps to feel better about yourself**

If you have low self-esteem, harness the power of your own thoughts and beliefs to change how you feel about yourself. Start with these four steps to a healthier self-esteem.

Low self-esteem can negatively affect virtually every facet of your life, including your relationships, your job and your health. But you can take steps to boost your self-esteem by taking cues from types of mental health counseling.

*continued on Page 4*
Consider these steps, based on cognitive behavioral therapy:

1. **Identify troubling conditions or situations**
   Think about the conditions or situations that seem to deflate your self-esteem. Common triggers might include:
   - A work or school presentation;
   - A crisis at work or home;
   - A challenge with a spouse, loved one, co-worker or other close contact; and
   - A change in roles or life circumstances, such as a job loss or a child leaving home.

2. **Become aware of thoughts and beliefs**
   Once you’ve identified troubling situations, pay attention to your thoughts about them. This includes your self-talk – what you tell yourself – and your interpretation of what the situation means. Your thoughts and beliefs might be positive, negative or neutral. They might be rational (based on reason or facts) or irrational (based on false ideas).

3. **Challenge negative or inaccurate thinking**
   Your initial thoughts might not be the only possible way to view a situation, so test the accuracy of your thoughts. Ask yourself whether your view is consistent with facts and logic or whether other explanations for the situation might be plausible.

   Be aware that it can be hard to recognize inaccuracies in thinking. Long-held thoughts and beliefs can feel normal and factual, even though many are just opinions or perceptions.

   Also pay attention to thought patterns that erode self-esteem:
   - **All-or-nothing thinking.** You see things as either all good or all bad. For example, “If I don’t succeed in this task, I’m a total failure.”
   - **Mental filtering.** You see only negatives and dwell on them, distorting your view of a person or situation. For example, “I made a mistake on that report and now everyone will realize I’m not up to this job.”
   - **Converting positives into negatives.** You reject your achievements and other positive experiences by insisting that they don’t count. For example, “I only did well on that test because it was so easy.”
   - **Jumping to negative conclusions.** You reach a negative conclusion when little or no evidence supports it. For example, “My friend hasn’t replied to my email, so I must have done something to make her angry.”
   - **Mistaking feelings for facts.** You confuse feelings or beliefs with facts. For example, “I feel like a failure, so I must be a failure.”
   - **Negative self-talk.** You undervalue yourself, put yourself down or use self-deprecating humor. This can result from overreacting to a situation, such as making a mistake. For example, “I don’t deserve anything better.”

4. **Adjust your thoughts and beliefs**
   Now replace negative or inaccurate thoughts with accurate, constructive thoughts. Try these strategies:
   - **Use hopeful statements.** Treat yourself with kindness and encouragement. Pessimism can be a self-fulfilling prophecy. For example, if you think your presentation isn’t going to go well, you might indeed stumble through it. Try telling yourself things such as, “Even though it’s tough, I can handle this situation.”
   - **Forgive yourself.** Everyone makes mistakes, and mistakes aren’t permanent reflections on you as a person. They’re isolated moments in time. Tell yourself, “I made a mistake, but that doesn’t make me a bad person.”
   - **Avoid ‘should’ and ‘must’ statements.** If you find that your thoughts are full of these words, you might be putting unreasonable demands on yourself, or on others. Removing these words from your thoughts can lead to more realistic expectations.
   - **Focus on the positive.** Think about the good parts of your life. Remind yourself of things that have gone well recently. Consider the skills you’ve used to cope with challenging situations.
‘Steps to feel healthy…’ continued from Page 4

- **Relabel upsetting thoughts.** You don’t need to react negatively to negative thoughts. Instead, think of negative thoughts as signals to try new, healthy patterns. Ask yourself, “What can I think and do to make this less stressful?”

- **Encourage yourself.** Give yourself credit for making positive changes. For example, “My presentation might not have been perfect, but my colleagues asked questions and remained engaged – which means that I accomplished my goal.”

You also might try these steps, based on acceptance and commitment therapy:

1. **Identify troubling conditions or situations**
   Again, think about the conditions or situations that seem to deflate your self-esteem. Once you’ve identified troubling situations, pay attention to your thoughts about them.

2. **Step back from your thoughts**
   Repeat your negative thoughts many times or write them down in an unusual way, such as with your nondominant hand. Imagine seeing your negative thoughts written on different objects. You might even sing a song about them in your mind.

These exercises can help you take a step back from your thoughts and beliefs and observe them. Instead of trying to change your thoughts, distance yourself from your thoughts. Realize that they are nothing more or less than words.

3. **Accept your thoughts**
   Instead of fighting, resisting or being overwhelmed by negative thoughts or feelings, accept them. You don’t have to like them, just allow yourself to feel them.

Negative thoughts don’t need to be controlled, changed or acted upon. Aim to lessen the power of your negative thoughts and their influence on your behavior.

These steps might seem awkward at first, but they’ll get easier with practice. As you begin to recognize the thoughts and beliefs that are contributing to your low self-esteem, you can counter them or change the way you think about them. This will help you accept your value as a person. As your self-esteem increases, your confidence and sense of well-being are likely to soar.

By © 2015 Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research (MFMER). All rights reserved.