



How To Build YOUR Self Esteem

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Introduction

What is self esteem? The expression was first used by William James in 1890. This American psychologist and philosopher said that self esteem is 'one's mental perception of (his) qualities, not physical features'

With the growth in the social sciences and popular culture from the 1950's onwards, concepts like 'self esteem' have become more widely discussed, not only within the profession of psychology but more generally within western society which has become increasingly focused on the individual.

There are various definitions of self esteem, but in essence, it is the value we place on ourselves as individuals and in relation to others. Maurice Rosenberg in the 1960s said that self esteem can be self tested. This period of the development of social sciences saw the development of 'testing' and 'measuring' methods which enabled more empirical studies to be carried out. Previously most of the social scientists were known primarily for their theoretical work.

The other shift is that whereas previously the goal was to measure self esteem, it is now the goal to achieve the right level of self esteem.

If our self esteem is too low, we are seeing ourselves as less valuable than those around us. So we are encouraged to improve our self esteem in order to become more confident, happier, and better able to lead a full and rewarding life.

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If our self esteem is too high, we are probably suffering from 'unearned' esteem, and see ourselves as better than those around us. This has been associated with bullying, violence and aggression to others.

So getting our self esteem level right, is to have a sense of self worth that is not reliant on individual events or achievements. It is not about being better than or superior to others. A healthy level of self esteem is linked to respect for ourselves but importantly, having respect for others.

A good and healthy level of self esteem will enable us to cope with disappointments and criticisms. It also enables us to attempt new challenges, to seek out new relationships, and to work towards our futures with a level of confidence and belief in our abilities.

Self esteem is not just about being good at one or two things. For example, a pianist may feel very confident of their musical ability. They may feel confident performing in front of an audience. However they may lack self esteem when it comes to their ability to maintain a good relationship with their partner, or in their ability to make decisions outside of their work in music.

From a scientific point of view, the subject of self esteem is only part of the understanding of the human individual, how our mental maps operate, and how to help people achieve their potential and avoid suffering and mental illness.

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From the point of view of educationalists, the relationship between self esteem and academic or educational success is important. This is particularly the case for understanding where individual children or young adults are under achieving or having difficulty in getting on with their peers. Schools are under increasing pressure to assess the needs of children in terms of areas that would previously have been seen as parental responsibility.

Some children have a difficult life at home, and have to deal with major events such as divorce, family illness, lack of parental love and support, and situations like moving home and leaving behind friends or relations. Many children have to cope with bereavement, parental illness, poverty, ignorance and being surrounded by people with low self esteem. Their chances of growing to be happy, healthy young adults, with confidence in themselves and their futures are therefore reduced.

Another social change that involves an evaluation of self esteem is the drive towards equality of woman. Only 60 years ago it was unusual for a woman to expect to be considered equal to men in the job market place. Of course there were exceptions, and famous women doctors, scientists, entrepreneurs etc.

During the second world war women filled the jobs vacated by men going to fight, but generally were encouraged to leave when the men returned. The development of the social sciences after the Second World War saw a large increase of women in higher education and thereafter in employment.

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However, there is still a view that women are under achieving in the world of commerce, senior management, science and the glass ceiling still effectively limits the progression of women.

Women are constantly bombarded with aspirational material. The media overflows with perfect looking women with fabulous figures, hair, skin, nails, and wow, not only are they perfect mothers and home makers, they are earning loads of money too! Clearly this is a tough call - how can women compete?

So children and women are just two groups for whom the consideration of 'self esteem' is generally considered to be important.

Although the subject of self esteem continues to be important with the field of science and education, it is increasingly a topic on which we read a great deal in books, magazines, newspapers and on the internet. There are TV shows such as Oprah where celebrities and the ordinary person share their personal stories about issues like poor self esteem.

For many people this can be the start to finding the courage to being improving their own self esteem. No easy task if you feel you are less able, less effective, and generally inadequate.

So where do we start? If we think we have low self esteem we probably have taken the first step by articulating that thought. The next step is to try and find out more.

There are a range of self test opportunities on the internet. The questions in these tests can indicate how we react to situations and people.

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Generally people who have a good level of self esteem behave well towards people around them. They are not overly aggressive or passive, and do not need to use loud voices, threatening behavior or alternatively, to whimper or grovel.

So it is in our own interests to try and assess whether we have the right level of self esteem. We can these days find tests on the internet, and even better, can find helpful ways to adjust our self esteem for the better.

Sadly, our self esteem is most likely to need adjusting when we feel low, depressed, and generally, unhappy. Even sadder, is the fact that when we feel like this, it is harder to do the 'self improvement' thing. It is harder to be clear headed about recognizing our problems, and finding solutions.

Thankfully, the development of the World Wide Web has made it possible for us to find all sorts of information, from all sorts of sources, within a very short time.

It has also become possible to access the views of people in similar situations, and their positive views on how we can improve our lives can be one of the most important ways of starting to do it.

Self esteem, high, low or average is a major factor in all of our lives. In this book we will be examining the experts' views on how we come to have high or low self esteem, and the way in which this impacts on our development, our decision making, our partnerships and relationships with others, and our life chances.

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Of course as we grow, there are times when we are developing our self esteem without really understanding what this is and how important it is.

There are also times when our degree of self esteem can be most critical. For example, in our pre-teens, our teens and early twenties when we are progressing through the education system, and embarking on our early adult life.

We are at this time beginning to develop personal relationships outside our families and immediate peer groups that could lead to life long consequences.

During these years we are more likely to be affected by how our peers see us. During these years we are more likely to want to be seen as 'part of the group'. Being seen as 'outside' the group can be frightening when we are young. A relatively small proportion of young people want to be seen as totally individualistic and different from their peers.

These days we have a better understanding that low self esteem can have a potentially detrimental effect on our lives. This makes it possible to work towards changing our levels of self esteem.

We are all much more aware of the effect of the consequences of low self esteem, and can now find information on ways of improving the self esteem of our children and indeed ourselves.

As adults, we can now find a whole range of information about self esteem. We can take tests on the internet to see how high or low our self esteem is considered by some of the experts.

Chapter One

What exactly is self –esteem?

Literally, your self esteem is the esteem in which you hold yourself. If you perceive yourself to be inadequate, unworthy, unable, etc, you hold yourself in low self esteem. This will probably affect your behavior and how you communicate with other people. You might find it harder to look people straight in the eye, and you might fidget if you feel nervous.

People may think of you as nervous or timid and less likely to recommend yourself for a pay rise, or to easily put yourself forward for a promotion. You might also let others 'walk all over you'.

Sometimes we can go through periods when life is a bit tougher, perhaps after a divorce, or relationship breakdown. A situation like this, or perhaps losing a job through a company downsizing or relocating – clearly not something for which we can be held to account, can lead to a temporary loss of self-esteem.

So self-esteem is not a fixed thing. Our lives are generally full of change. We begin, as does everyone else, as a child, and very dependent upon our parents and other adults. Part of this dependency is for approval, love and support – for nurturing.

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If we are fortunate, we are treasured, made to feel comfortable in our achievements and failings. We can't all be top of the class, or make the school sports teams. We may achieve things some of the time, but not all the time. Many people are highly valued in their lives, their work, and their social networks, but this is not dependant upon coming first, getting medals.

If on the other hand we are unfortunate and don't have kind, loving and supportive parents, maybe it is because they don't understand how important self esteem is. It may be that our parents don't have the self confidence to enable them to help us. We learn to assess ourselves also by how our teachers and friends treat us.

We might have a great home life, but for some reason get picked on by a bully or group of bullies, and as a result can be scared, and feel our self esteem drop like a stone.

The main thing is to see our self esteem as something that we can affect ourselves. We can learn to recognize when our self esteem is getting a bit delicate, and when we need to give ourselves a boost.

Positive thinking and a positive attitude is now recognized as a very valuable tool in managing our lives. This can benefit ourselves individually of course, but it is also important in that it can benefit the lives of those around us, and particularly those who depend on us.

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Of course some people appear to have oodles of self esteem - really worryingly too much self esteem in fact. They behave as if they are the only people on the planet. This is not a good level of self esteem if it makes a person too selfish or too demanding.

If someone doesn't respect the people around them, and only respects themselves, they have an unhealthy level of self esteem. This unearned self esteem has been linked with bullying, violence and aggression.

A too high opinion of ones self can result in unpleasant behavior to others, aggressive language and mannerisms and being overly loud and opinionated. . If we become really only concerned with ourselves, our own rights and entitlements, we are showing signs of excessively high self esteem.

So what we need to aim for is a healthy level of self esteem. Not too much, and not too little. With a healthy level of self esteem, an individual is likely to have a sensible view of their character, their ability, and their potential.

Being able to make sensible evaluations of ourselves and others is far less stressful than having an overly high or low view of ourselves.

With a healthy level of self esteem we can more likely maintain calm, rational thought processes and behavior. We can deal with difficult situations more easily if we have a reasonable level of self esteem.

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We are less likely to become defensive or aggressive, and we are less likely to appear flustered, bombastic or nervous. Calm behavior is likely to result in others feeling more confident in us.

So it is definitely in our interests both in feeling 'better in ourselves' and the realization that others will feel more comfortable in our company, if we have a good level of self esteem, neither too high, nor too low.

Chapter 2

How do we assess our self esteem?

One of the consequences of having low self-esteem is not wanting to put ourselves in strange situations. So going to a professional and asking for a 'self esteem test' is just not something we would be likely to do. The benefit of the internet is that we can now easily find information about self-esteem, and ways of assessing or measuring our own.

If we start to feel reluctant to do things, and feel we are beginning to have lots of negative thoughts about ourselves then this is a sign that something is wrong. When we avoid starting things we know we have to do, and when we begin to think we don't deserve to be loved, and are less important than those around us, we should be thinking about assessing our self esteem.

Visit the World Wide Web, and we can find tests for children, tests for women, and general tests. They all vary slightly, and there are free tests and tests you pay for. Generally the free ones give you a score, and a brief indication of the areas in which your self esteem could do with boosting.

On the other hand you can sign up and pay for a much more detailed assessment of your self esteem, and suggestions for ways to use positive thinking, positive affirmations and positive attitudes to improve your self esteem and to help you develop self confidence and the ability to face new experiences and challenges with a smile.

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It is important however to recognize that in some instances it is best to find a recommended professional, rather than use internet tests. For example, if you feel that your child or younger brother or sister have low self-esteem and it is affecting them in a serious way, you should talk to someone with professional training, or an adult in whom you have trust, like a teacher.

For children the development of self-esteem begins at an early age, and the way they feel can vary from one stage of development to another, depending on the circumstances of their lives.

For children with seriously low self-esteem, getting the right help is very important. For parents of children with low self-esteem it is very important to consider how our own behavior can influence their self regard.

Children feel reassured by parents who are calm, warm and loving. It is important to give children reassurance that helps them open up and explain how they feel.

It is important to be sensitive when children feel they are not succeeding. Telling them how proud you are of their efforts, how much you think they have achieved, is better than telling them they will surely get in the team 'next' time, or pass the exam 'next time'.

Children will be facing lots of different 'new' experiences of course and should have realistic expectations of their achievement. No child is going to win everything or be top at everything. Most of us don't get to be top at anything. Most of us are just regular people.

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Doing something to the best of our ability is what most of us aim for. Success in life is not about being 'the best'. Success is about all sorts of things.

Children need to know they are succeeding, so need to know about all the ways in which they can succeed.

It is always a good idea to praise children when they show that they are:

- Being good friends to other children
- Learning to value themselves and others
- Helping younger children as mentors
- Putting all their effort into new challenges
- Learning how to treat other people well
- Learning how to deal with coming second or third, or twenty third
- Learning the difference between good behavior and bad behavior
- Being able to deal with criticism

If children have low self esteem it can be hard for them to explain how they feel. This can be very difficult if they already feel they are failing, and not as good or clever as their friends. Gentle support will help children feel comfortable enough to tell you how they feel.

For adults there are a range of self tests available on the internet that can help us assess our level of self esteem. There are also some for older children which are worded in a way that children will feel comfortable with.

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But we can ask some simple questions like....

- Do you feel comfortable trying new things and meeting new people?
- Do you think you are generally liked?
- Do you think you have the respect of your work colleagues?
- Do you feel happy most of the time?
- Do you look forward to new challenges?
- Do you value your own opinion?

If you answer yes to these questions you probably don't have low self esteem. However if you think you have low self esteem, you might want to find out more.

Sometime it helps just to read about self esteem and think about how feel about what we have read. We may feel that although we don't have the 'optimum' level of self esteem, we are reasonably self confident and just need to have a bit of a tinker with some of our attitudes and feelings.

For example, an understanding of how our level of self esteem is formed can give us a better feel for our level of esteem. Our experiences with our family and other people as we are growing up will be very instrumental in developing our self esteem.

If we are treated well, kindly and fairly by our parents, teachers and peers, we are more likely to have a healthy level of self esteem. However if we are treated badly, and we believe unfairly, it is more likely that our self esteem will be low. Regular criticism, being told we are 'useless'

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'stupid' etc., being constantly being reminded of our failings - these are likely to damage our self esteem.

Low self esteem can result if we are generally told we are 'useless' or 'stupid'. If we are shouted at, or ignored, or made to feel we are in the way, or not really wanted - these attitudes are damaging to self esteem.

On the other hand, if we experience a kind and understanding reaction to an exam failure, or not getting a certain job or onto the netball or football team, we may from an early age understand that one exam failure doesn't mean we are failures as people.

Supportive and loving parents, and others who keep things in a sensible perspective, will help us develop a good and healthy level of self esteem. These people will want us to feel good about ourselves. They won't want us to have negative feelings about ourselves, and they won't want us to be full of ourselves either.

Sadly, many people who suffer from low self esteem find it hard to develop good communication skills. For their children this can be devastating, and serves to pass down to the next generation the same difficulties and concerns they have themselves.

If we can learn from this, we can see that the way those who have hurt us have behaved reflects more on themselves than it does on us. They don't want to hurt us, but don't know how to behave differently.

Learning that self esteem is itself a 'learned' behavior is important in helping us to change our

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view of ourselves. If something is learned, it can often be unlearned.

If we can learn how to value ourselves more fairly, we can influence our future behavior, our future life chances. Perhaps most importantly, we can learn how to behave better with our own children or other youngsters in order to improve their life chances too.

We are complex individuals, and have individual abilities, characteristics, skills and mannerisms.

Winning at sport, succeeding in exams, being talented in music, art or languages are examples of things we aspire to, and areas in which we will inevitably have to compete with others.

Our value as individuals is not defined by any one of these achievements or indeed by any one thing at all. So not being in the top 10 of the class at French, or not being chosen for the football team, is no reason to feel a failure.

Having a girl friend or boyfriend is not essential for happiness either. If we evaluate ourselves that way, we are failing to understand that self worth, and how others see us is about our self perception and behavior, how we deal with the ups and downs of life, and how we behave with other people.

If we are able to say for example:-

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"I really tried my best, but am not likely to be in the Olympic swimming team"

or

"I can see that my friend John gets on really well with my other friend James, this doesn't mean that they don't like me."

This shows a rational reaction. This shows to other people that you recognize your strengths and weaknesses. It shows that you can be understanding and not resentful of others. It also shows that you can be self deprecating.

This is quite different from self pity as it does not require people to respond by saying 'oh you mustn't worry - you will find something else you are good at - don't upset yourself. Self deprecation is normally a sign of healthy modesty, but with humor!

If however we say:-

"Oh I am such a complete failure, I never succeed at anything, I don't know why I bother to try."

or

"No-one really cares about me, and I don't blame them, the other kids are much more interesting."

or

"I quite see why I don't have a partner, I wouldn't want to go out with me."

These statements show a low level of self confidence and self esteem. We can however learn

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to deal with situations differently. We have to begin to see that feeling negative about ourselves is catching, and we really don't want other people to think badly of us.

So we have to develop strategies for thinking in a positive way. For example:-

"I don't have a boyfriend/girlfriend at the moment, so I can really put lots of time and energy into my music."

"Two of my friends get on really well, which is great to see".

"I am not an astounding success, but I really do enjoy having a go at something new".

"I am really lucky to have some very amusing and interesting friends."

This way of thinking about things is positive, and reinforces healthy self respect.

Chapter 3

How do we begin to improve our self-esteem?

One of the first steps in building our self esteem is to believe that it is possible to do it. It is also necessary to believe in 'self-help'.

For most people the lack of healthy self esteem is whilst serious, not so debilitating that professional intervention is necessary. Sadly for some, professional help is necessary at least initially. If we are concerned about a young child having very low self-esteem then it is much better to seek out some professional guidance.

It is when first recognizing the need for improving our self esteem, or self image, that the success stories of others can be of most help. Feeling isolated and helpless is a very difficult starting point for self help.

Thankfully, with the development of the internet, one of the greatest benefits is having access to millions of other individuals without necessarily leaving your sitting room. When you see how many people have benefited from the stories of others it gives real hope. One of the worst things about lacking in self confidence is feeling that no one else knows what its like.

Once you can believe in the possibility of change through self help, you can review the methods advocated by experts, professionals, and individuals who have managed to improve their lives by learning how to value themselves.

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Valuing yourself is also about valuing others. It is recognizing that we all have rights, we all have value, and we also all have a responsibility to behave in an appropriate way to each other.

There are various ways in which we can start to build our self esteem, some are physical, and some are about training ourselves to think and act positively.

Physical health is really very important too. A healthy body helps you to have a healthy attitude. Regular exercise makes you feel good physically. It helps you sleep well, and both exercise and sleep help you function well mentally as well as physically.

How we feel can be affected by the production of chemicals and hormones, which is closely linked to our generally physical well being.

Eating a good diet, and avoiding foods that have a dramatic up and down effect on your blood sugars, will help keep you calm and focused. Too much carbohydrate, particularly sugars, can give feelings of physical low or high.

It is far better to keep a regular blood sugar level by eating the right foods, and eating little and often. Snacking on fast food is definitely not that good for blood sugar levels. It is far better to eat 'brain' food and healthy foods, like celery sticks, carrots, cucumber sticks, and fresh raw vegetables, than packets of crisps, salty nuts and biscuits.

You also need to set some guidelines for how you are going to spend your time.

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In addition to a healthy diet, regular exercise and getting enough sleep, you should ensure that you make time to enjoy yourself. We often feel we 'should' be doing this or that, and feeling guilty about time spent just enjoying ourselves.

However, have fun and enjoyment helps our systems release 'good' natural chemicals. Laughing is now known to be incredibly good for our health. If we are smiling and happy, we are likely to make the people around us comfortable. If we are frowning, looking worried, and generally miserable, we will be giving the wrong signals to people around us.

Think about what hobbies or interests you would like to spend time on. We all like different things and have different lives. Some of us like sports, whilst others are not sporty but still need some exercise.

There is no point in forcing yourself to join a team sport when really you would get far more enjoyment if you had two long walks a week, and read one or two good books. However some of us really don't enjoy reading, but love joining in with sports and activities.

Whatever we choose, we should be thinking about spending less time in front of the TV or the computer screen, and more time in the fresh air, reading a good book, learning a new skill, or developing a new hobby.

Finding something that is of real interest is important.

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One regularly recommended activity is yoga. For centuries this has been considered to be one of the best activities for our bodies, our minds, and our nervous systems. Most yoga teachers will incorporate into their classes, some relaxation techniques. These are often accompanied by 'affirmations' like 'everything is good in my world' 'I am happy and healthy and love life'

Yoga is best learned with a teacher, as it is important not to strain the body and posture is very important. However there are tapes and DVDs and lots of books if you can't find a class locally.

Most people who practice yoga find that it has improved their lives immeasurably both physically and mentally. They feel more relaxed, physically fitter, and more limber. They become comfortable with 'positive thinking' and understand that thinking negatively is not healthy. With yoga we learn to relax, and we learn the importance of living a healthy life and making sensible decisions in order to care for our bodies and our minds.

Getting things into perspective is also very important. Learning not to dwell on things when they go wrong is a good way of leaving some damaging thoughts behind you.

Once something has happened, it has happened - and it is gone. We can learn from events, but there is no value in worrying about something that is now in the past, and about which you can do nothing. You can't go back and change it.

It is worth remembering too, that other people probably won't remember it - they won't be thinking about it each time they see you - they won't judge your whole character on the basis of it either.

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Someone once said to me that unless something is still going to be a problem a year next Wednesday, you might as well just let it go! And how many things are there to worry about a year next Wednesday? Not many! Carrying worrying and negative thoughts around with you is a burden. It stops you dealing with the next thing with an open and positive mind. It limits your opportunity to do well in the next thing you do.

So don't feel you must be overly critical of yourself, and when you achieve something, you should pat yourself on the shoulder, reward yourself if you think it appropriate. Again don't dwell on it - there will be lots of other successes.

Sometimes of course, times are tough. Work is hard, things don't go right, and people around you are putting you under pressure. Learn that it is best not to let things get you down too much.

Sometimes we need to take time out to think about something that is happening. Ask ourselves what if anything we can do to make things better. If it's a situation that we cannot influence, sometimes we have to just hang on in there and carry on.

Put on a brave face, chin up and try and behave as though all is well. Soon it will be, and you will have shown self belief that you will get through a tough time. You will have learnt to believe in yourself. This is success!

Success builds on success - it really is true. Once you begin to believe in yourself it feels like a weight is lifted and your enjoyment of life increases. Everything seems to be suddenly more achievable.

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The ability to help ourselves is invaluable. Sometimes however hard it is to do, we benefit enormously by asking others to help us too. It is hard sometimes to know where to start, and hard to know exactly what help you are asking for. Although its hard to do, sometimes its helpful to ask your friends or family for their honest input.

Finding out how others see us is difficult but valuable. Find someone you trust and ask them how they see you. Ask them what it is about you that they think defines you. They may tell you they feel you are honest, loyal, and caring. They may say they think you have a wonderful sense of humor.

Try drawing up a list of what you think are your strengths and weaknesses and ask your friends if they think this is a true assessment.

We are none of us perfect, so if we are told that some 'home truths' about our character its not the end of the world. If we don't realize these things we are not likely to think about changing them for the better.

Developing good self-esteem is also about being realistic. It is not necessary to suddenly aspire to dizzy heights of success in everything you do. It is about understanding where your strengths and weaknesses are, and thinking about how you can make the most of the former, and improve on the latter.

It is about knowing that you are what you are, and knowing that you can be a positive, confident person, worthy of being loved and respected.

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If you feel unable to approach friends or family, consider talking to a professional. Most large organizations will have counseling services available for their employees, and if you are a student, there will be counseling services available within nearly all educational institutions.

Counselors will deal with your concerns in a confidential way. You don't have to tell anyone else if you don't want to. Whilst it used to be unusual for people to have counseling, life has become much more complex for many of us, and counseling is now seen as a sensible way to deal with problems and promote good health.

Counseling is a very personal thing. It is essential to feel confident in your counselor. Remember that you should have the right to reject a counselor if you are not happy with them. Ask you could see someone else if you feel uncomfortable. This in itself is a difficult task for someone with low self esteem, but it is worth it - and so are you!!

Chapter 4

How can we help others to develop their self-esteem

We have already looked at how we need to be positive in our thinking and attitudes when trying to improve our own self esteem. For helping others we also need to use a positive approach, and help them see their self worth and value too.

If we ourselves feel our self esteem benefits from receiving encouragement and supportive treatment by others, then clearly we can help others by encouraging them and reassuring them that they are valued and respected by us.

Not everyone is brought up in an environment where it is normal to give complements or pats on the back. Not everyone is used to this. It does feel good though, to hear that you have done something well, or have dealt with something in the right way.

My husband and I have a deal that every Saturday morning we use all our endeavours to be loving and supportive, and not to disagree. It's the week end, and after a week at work we are both tired and would like to relax - we don't always want to do the household chores and maintenance jobs that are necessary.

Somehow there is always so much to do on a Saturday, so Saturday mornings can be stressful.

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The deal is that we agree with each other, and congratulate each other for every good idea or suggestion. This is good practice at being nice and supportive to each other when we are both feeling tired. And it always brings a smile to both of our faces, and a reason for a hug and some mutual nurturing.

It helps us remember that the chores and jobs are less important than our support for each other and the need to care for each other.

Part of the commitment within family life is to give mutual support and encouragement. Sometimes we forget. Sometimes our egos or our schedules just get in the way. Sometimes we can be unforgiving, critical and judgmental.

However it is within our family that we can provide most help and support, and within our family that we can most benefit from it too.

Isn't it generally the case that when two people meet and fall in love, they smile at the whole world. When you are in love you want everyone else to be happy too. As relationships develop it can be hard to feel that euphoria with the world and our loved ones on an every day basis. Every day just creeps in and we act differently. We forget to smile at each other, and don't feel like spreading warmth and joy like chocolate chips to everyone we meet.

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It is time to stop and think. What are some of the principles of happiness, confidence and good self esteem?

- Making our health and well one of our priorities.
- Nurturing ourselves.
- Respecting ourselves, our bodies and our minds.
- Respecting others.

So if we start to see how much happier we can be in our family lives if we make the effort to remember to be kind, supportive, and generous with praise and affection, we can help each other, and help ourselves.

Conclusion

Self-esteem is our feeling of self worth that influences our behavior and interaction with others. We can't touch it or feel it but it is with us all the time and is part of us.

We begin to develop our self esteem when we are very young. With each new thing we learn, with each bit of praise we receive for that new achievement, we learn to feel good about ourselves.

When we are younger, our self esteem is more likely to be affected by how we think others see us and how they value us. As we grow older, and our lives become more established, our self esteem is less affected by other people. However in our adult lives, it is still very important to understand that self-esteem is largely in our own hands.

Our behavior is largely learnt as the consequence of interactions with others and circumstances. We know it is possible to re-learn and help ourselves to change.

'Self help', 'positive thinking' and 'positive attitude' - we hear these phrases much more these days. We see questionnaires in magazines, we see lots of books for sale which are aimed at helping people to re learn and re train themselves towards a happier and more successful life.

We can find articles and self-esteem tests on the internet. Altogether we are unlikely now to be unaware that we can begin to think about improving our self esteem.

Building Self-Esteem

Children suffering from low self esteem can suffer badly. It is important to recognize signs of low self esteem in children, and to learn how best to help boost their confidence and help them deal with being 'regular' kids and not necessarily top achievers.

Advice and help should be available in most schools, or through your local medical centre. If professional counseling is considered necessary, do listen to your child if they say they don't get on with the counselor - like all of us it is possible to get on well with some people but not others. This is even more important for children who can find it hard to talk about how they feel to adults they don't know.

We, as adults, can read about self help methods for dealing with low self esteem, and we can hopefully find someone we trust to talk to about it. We can make decisions about how best to look after ourselves, both physically and mentally, and we can plan our strategy for improving our self esteem.

We can change the way we deal with events, we can learn to see the positive side of things, and we can change the way we perceive ourselves. This is not always easy by any means, but it can be done, a bit at a time.

Once we see how to help ourselves, we are then in a better position to try and help others. Most of us know friends or family members who under value themselves and find it difficult to face new challenges. How better to help our own self esteem than by knowing we are helping someone else.