



**P**eople with healthy self-esteem see themselves in an accurate way, value their own strengths and contributions, and accept their limitations. They see themselves as unique individuals who are deserving of happiness regardless of their experiences.

# Healthy Self-Esteem

## WHAT IS HEALTHY SELF-ESTEEM?

Healthy self-esteem refers to realistic, affirming thoughts and feelings about oneself. People with healthy self-esteem treat themselves and others with respect, take responsibility for their own behavior and are proud of what they accomplish. They are able to motivate themselves, believing that they are capable of coping with life's challenges and competent to make good decisions.

Some people struggle to feel good about themselves in general. Others find that they value certain aspects of themselves (e.g. feeling confident about athletic abilities) while also having negative feelings about other aspects (e.g. feeling socially unskilled).

## CAN A PERSON HAVE TOO MUCH SELF-ESTEEM?

Some worry that developing strong self-esteem will ultimately result in an over-inflated sense of self, conceitedness and bragging. Egocentric behavior, however, is typically seen as an indication of low self-esteem. Strong self-esteem is marked by a balanced and realistic sense of personal worth and competence. It is founded on respect for oneself and respect for others. People with healthy self-esteem avoid comparing themselves with, or judging, others and look to themselves to feel good about life. In addition to recognizing their strengths, people with healthy self-esteem are also able to acknowledge their mistakes and limitations.

## WHAT CAN I DO TO DEVELOP BETTER SELF-ESTEEM?

- Remember that it is natural to feel good about some aspects of your self and less positive about other areas.
- Recognize that developing and maintaining healthy self-esteem is a life-long process. It is your job to help yourself feel good about you over the course of your life. Assuming responsibility for yourself and how you feel is key to maintaining a strong sense of self-worth.
- Think about your thinking. Are your self-appraisals realistic and accurate or overly negative and exaggerated?

## WHAT ARE SOME SIGNS OF POOR SELF-ESTEEM?

### COGNITIVE

- Judging oneself harshly
- Expectations of negative evaluation
- Expectations of failure
- Expectations of perfection
- Blaming others for difficulties
- Doubts about self-worth

### BEHAVIORAL

- Communication difficulties
- Procrastination
- Avoiding difficult situations
- Performing below potential
- Difficulty handling criticism
- Lack of goals
- Irresponsibility
- Acting arrogant, bragging
- Attempts to impress others
- Reluctance to take risks
- Using violence to solve problems
- Substance abuse

### EMOTIONAL

- Depressed mood
- Feelings of anxiety
- Feelings of helplessness
- Lack of respect for others
- Difficulty showing caring
- Difficulty trusting oneself
- Feelings of contempt
- Difficulty managing anger

## WHERE CAN I GET HELP?

If you think that you may be experiencing a personal problem that relates to self-esteem, and require professional assistance, call

Student Counselling Services  
(966-4920)

Student Health Services  
(966-5768)

- Learn to recognize negative predictions (“He’ll think I’m stupid.”), harsh self-criticisms (“I’m so boring.”), perfectionist self-statements (“I have to get this right.”) and beliefs about helplessness (“It won’t matter if I try.”).
- Challenge negative self-talk. When you notice negative self-statements, try asking yourself questions such as: “Is this always true?”, “What are the odds of that really happening?”, “Could there be another possibility?”, “Is there another explanation?”, “Is this helpful?” and “Would I talk to a friend this way?”.
- Generate positive self-statements that are encouraging and believable to you (e.g. “I’m not the strongest player on the team and probably never will be. But I give lots of effort during games and practices. I know I can get better over time.”). Reciting empty, overly-positive affirmations is unlikely to be effective.
- Challenge avoidance behavior. Avoiding anxiety-provoking situations robs you of the opportunity to see that you can cope with challenges.
- Seek meaningful accomplishments. Taking risks, working hard, finding out what you are good at, and learning that you can bounce back from failures will help you feel proud of yourself.
- Develop relationships with people who are affirming. Learn to share time with others, have fun, and communicate in a direct and respectful way. Learn to give and accept support.
- Live by your values and take responsibility for your actions. Acting with integrity will help you feel good about who you are.
- Respect and care for your belongings and space.
- Take care of your physical health. Eat well, exercise regularly and get enough rest. Avoid excessive use of caffeine. Seek professional help if you have problems with substance use.
- Read about ways to build self-esteem.
- Give yourself credit for taking charge and helping yourself grow. Be patient, too. Lasting change usually takes time.

Reasoner, R. (2004). The True Meaning of Self-Esteem. Retrieved May, 18, 2004 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.self-esteem-nase.org>.