



TIP SHEET FOR BUILDING SELF ESTEEM

Do you ever.....

- feel very distressed when you are criticised?
- get upset if people don't like you?
- often feel guilty, depressed or angry?
- have difficulty in saying 'no'?
- feel that you don't measure up to others?
- experience anxiety in a social situation?
- have difficulty asserting your own needs?

.....then it is likely that you experience low self esteem.

WHAT IS LOW SELF ESTEEM?

Self esteem is the value you place on yourself. It is how you assess yourself as a human being. If you have high self esteem you can accept yourself just as you are, including your mistakes and shortcomings. You believe that you are as 'OK' as anyone else. In order to value yourself you don't need to think that you are better than others. In comparison, if you have low self esteem you do not unconditionally value yourself and often compare yourself unfavourably with others. Alternatively you may need to believe that you are better than others. Your self worth is fragile and can be affected by day to day events such as a poor exam mark or a poor performance on the sporting field. Your frequent self criticism can contribute to frequent feelings of anxiety and depression.

HOW TO CHANGE YOUR THINKING TO BUILD SELF ESTEEM

Start noticing negative self evaluations

For example, if you make a mistake or fail an exam you may label yourself as 'dumb', 'hopeless' or 'a fraud'. Often these very critical statements are automatic and therefore totally inaccurate. They can trick you into believing that they are facts rather than just *thoughts*. When this happens they can cause you to feel worse about yourself. You can get started by just observing this negative mind chatter. When you begin noticing these thoughts you can then choose not to focus on them and just remind yourself that they are just *thoughts*. Of course it is often not easy to change old thought patterns, so it will take some practice.

Use affirmations

When you notice this critical self and you are trying to let go of the destructive thoughts, it can help to use small statements that affirm yourself eg. 'I'm OK, 'I can do it', 'It's OK to make a mistake'.

Let go of 'shoulds'

Let go of as many '*shoulds*' as possible eg. 'I *should* have done better'; 'I *should* have been a better friend'. These '*shoulds*' can cause you to feel totally inadequate. Of course this does not mean that it's not OK to want to improve yourself, however these '*shoulds*' can become so demanding that you can never meet their high standards. It is important to remind yourself that you are human and as a consequence you are not perfect. Acknowledge your weaknesses without harsh judgement.

Acknowledge your strengths If your self esteem is low you are more likely to amplify your weaknesses and diminish your strengths. Learn to accept compliments by simply saying 'thank you'.

Avoid comparing yourself with others.

When you compare yourself with other people someone has to lose and if you don't feel good about yourself, that person will probably be you! Remind yourself that you are unique, with your own set of strengths and weaknesses.

Above all, be your own best friend.

Respect and be kind to yourself as you would a best friend. For example, if a good friend had gained a few kilos would you tell them that they are 'ugly' and that therefore nobody would like them? No, you wouldn't - because you care about them and don't want them to feel bad about themselves. So why not be similarly accepting and nurturing towards yourself?

HOW TO TAKE ACTION TO BUILD SELF ESTEEM

Set realistic goals.

Take into account your personal and work commitments and set your goals accordingly. Having unrealistic expectations of yourself only sets you up for failure and you only end up feeling even worse about yourself. Remember, nobody is superhuman.

Notice and celebrate your achievements.

Even if it may seem small such as setting up a structure for your essay, it is still important to acknowledge your progress.

Surround yourself with positive people.

Hang around people who value you and build you up. Try to avoid those who put you down.

Take risks.

Self confidence rarely increases if you always stay in your comfort zone. Confront, rather than avoid situations that make you nervous. If, for example, you are frightened of giving oral presentations, choose a course that will challenge these fears.

Low self esteem is often associated with social anxiety. You may worry too much about what people think of you and be always on the lookout for signs of rejection. Don't dwell on these thoughts as this will often cause you to withdraw from people. Instead, try to focus on the content of the conversation. This can help you to distract yourself from that negative mind chatter. Assume an upright body posture and try to maintain good eye contact.

Communicate assertively.

Clearly communicating your thoughts and feelings to others helps you to value yourself. It gives a clear message to both yourself and others that what you say matters.

Above all, be patient with yourself.

It can take time to change what can be a life time of not valuing yourself. Acknowledge small steps in this journey and be gentle with yourself if you slip back into your old habits.

Where can I get further help?

Talk to a counsellor at the Newcastle campus (49215801) or the Central Coast campus (43484060).

What other resources are available?

Websites:

Overcoming Low Self-Esteem: Centre for Clinical Interventions:
http://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/resources/infopax.cfm?Info_ID=47 .This is a self help online module.

Books:

McKay, M., & Fanning, P. (2000). Self Esteem. California: New Harbinger Publications.
McKay, M., Fanning, P., Honeychurch, C., & Sutker, C. (2005). The Self Esteem Companion. California: New Harbinger Publications.
Wilding, C. (2010) Beat Low Self Esteem with CBT. London: Teach Yourself.

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