Improving your Self-Esteem

Our self-esteem is instilled in us during our youth. Being constantly criticized by family, friends, and society, tends to slowly strip us of our feelings of self-worth. Sometimes, it's not even others' criticism and judgment that does it. Failing in school or making a mistake in a game, cane have a big effect on us, because we also learn to judge ourselves negatively through our various experiences. We are all born with a certain personality type and temperament and our personality predicts how we perceive things in our environment and what we do with those perceptions. So, if we tend to be an introverted and quieter type of person, we are more likely to internalize judgments and criticism—taking it very personally. Whereas, if we're more inherently social and extroverted, we might just go outside and "play it off."

In any event, our low self-esteem strips us of our self-confidence to make even the smallest of decisions. Improving your self-esteem increases your confidence and is a first step towards finding contentment and a better life. Read on to find out how!

Some Steps

1.) Work on Improving Yourself

Dress nicely. No one is more conscious of your physical appearance than you are. When you don't look good, it changes the way you carry yourself and interact with other people. This doesn't mean you need to spend a lot on clothes. One great rule to follow is "spend twice as much, buy half as much". Rather than buying a bunch of cheap clothes, buy half as many select, high quality items. Expensive clothes wear out less easily and stay in style longer than cheap clothes. Of course, if money is really an issue, learn how to mix and match. That way your creativity keeps you always looking fresh!

Have good hygiene. Take care of your personal appearance. In most cases, significant improvements can be made by bathing and shaving frequently, wearing clean clothes and brushing your teeth twice a day. You will inevitably feel better about yourself. Even if you're not going out of the house, get up, shower, and dress. Feeling put together is worth the effort.

Practice good posture. People with slumped shoulders and lethargic movements display a lack of self-confidence. They often are unenthusiastic and don't consider themselves to be important. By practicing good posture, you'll automatically feel more confident. Stand up straight, keep your head up, and make eye contact. You'll make a positive impression on others and instantly feel more alert and empowered.

Work out regularly. Physical fitness has a huge effect on self-esteem and self-confidence. If you're out of shape, you'll feel insecure, unattractive, depressed, and fatigued. By working out, you improve your physical appearance and do something constructive with your time. It helps you physically, psychologically, and spiritually. It also makes you feel better by increasing the release of endorphins in your brain, giving you a natural boost of happiness and mental energy. Exercise also decreases toxins in your body, strengthens your core, and helps you to get more restful sleep. Even stretching for a few minutes can have a positive impact on your overall health and if you work out in the morning, it also creates positive momentum that you can build on the rest of the day.

Give back to others. Volunteer someplace in your community (and believe me, there are a lot of options out there). If you stop thinking about yourself and concentrate on the contribution you're making to the rest of the world, you won't worry as much about your own flaws. It gives you a sense of worth and usefulness and if you have a tendency toward self-pity, it will help take you out of that rut. This will increase your self-esteem.

2.) Make Yourself Stand Out

Compliment other people. Break the cycle of negativity by getting in the habit of praising other people. In the process, you'll become well liked and build self-confidence. By looking for the best in others, you indirectly bring out the best in yourself. Even a simple smile toward someone is helpful. It's difficult to feel sad when you smile (your mouth is linked to your brain, you know—try it).

Sit in the front row. Most people prefer the back of a classroom or office because they're afraid of being noticed. This reflects a lack of self-confidence. By deciding to sit in the front row, you can get over this irrational fear and build your self-confidence. You'll also be more visible to the important people talking from the front of the room.

Speak up. Many people never speak up because they're afraid that people will judge them or think they're stupid. The simple fact is, that these are fears everyone experiences. By making an effort to speak up at least once in every group discussion, you'll become a better public speaker, more confident in your own thoughts, and recognized as a leader by your peers.

Walk faster. You don't have to power walk at all times, but people with confidence walk more quickly and with purpose. They walk with determination and destination. They have places to go and things to do. Even if you aren't in a hurry, you can increase your self-confidence by doing this, because you will look and feel more important (especially if you keep your head up).

3.) Remove Your Negative Self-Esteem

Start from within. Ignore any and all destructive criticism or insults, including any from your past. Your opinion of yourself is the most important opinion of all, because you know yourself better than anyone else. We have all been hurt by others at some time in our lives. We have all suffered pain. It is crucial not to internalize others' abuse and let them continue to hurt us by allowing it to plague us for the rest of our lives through our own thoughts. That only gives them power over us. If we let go of the past, ignore hurtful negativity, including from ourselves, and choose to do things to make ourselves happy, then *we* take back our power. Remember also, to live a virtuous life of morals and value and you increase your bid on happiness, which leads to contentment.

Create daily affirmations. Tell yourself that you are a wonderful person who deserves to be happy. Make a list of all the things you like about yourself. If you've made mistakes that prevent you from believing that you deserve to be happy, take measures to relieve that guilt. Apologize to people you may have hurt (if possible), learn from those mistakes, forgive yourself, and move on. A few examples of positive affirmations are:

- "I am a worthwhile person."

- "I have something to offer in this situation."
- "I am good enough."
- "I am smart and know how to problem-solve."

Start with small steps to gain confidence. Take small steps and make small choices to gain confidence in your ability to make a decision. As you practice, you will become secure in your ability to make good choices, you will gain confidence in yourself, and be more secure about your different abilities/capabilities, in general.

- For example, if purchasing jeans makes you anxious because of the plethora of brands, colors, and styles, then just go with your instincts. Your instinct is your gut mixed with prior experiential knowledge and can sometimes be a good guide. Trust yourself and go with whatever feels right to you. And if you really feel you made a wrong decision in retrospect, the situation can be easily rectified by exchanging the jeans.

Don't always try to please others. It is great to be considerate of others, but think before sacrificing your own needs to please them. Bending over backwards for strangers, mere acquaintances or people you don't trust, may leave you with the short end of the stick. In short, don't allow yourself to be used. Practice genuineness, honesty, and clear limit-setting and boundary-making and you will feel more confident, settled, and content, and others will know they can trust you, whether you say, "Yes" or "No" to their requests.

Be your own person. Don't try to copy anyone else. You will be at your best when you are being yourself because of your uniqueness. Strive to be your best and do not criticize yourself if you fall short of your expectations. You can only do **your** best at any given time.

Avoid negative people. It's a real downer. People who have a negative attitude which may rub off on you, are not good for you. If you're timid, loud and aggressive people are probably not good for you, and vice versa. In fact, some people can be "psychic vampires," sucking the life out of you if you hang around them for too long. Whatever you do, do not compare yourself to others. Just be the best that you can be.

Face your fears and learn from your failures. You've heard it before…you only fail when you don't try. Well, yeah, that's true. We also fail when we do not make the best out of adversity. When something doesn't go the way we would like it to, there is something to be learned from that, which can be applied next time you are in a similar situation. Get up and try again. It's all about learning from your failures and turning negatives into positives.

Stop the negative thoughts. Try positive thinking on for size. The term "self-fulfilling prophecy" in relation to self-esteem, basically states that whatever you believe about you, whether it be perfect or totally off-base, becomes true. If you constantly tell yourself that you are stupid or that you will never achieve success, you will in turn act as such. So, make a habit out of saying positive things about yourself and use the self-fulfilling prophecy to your advantage. Even if you don't believe it at first, you will eventually the more you practice. You'll start feeling better about yourself, when you least expect it!

Don't worry about being "perfect." Aiming for perfection in life is a lost cause, because the term means different things to different people. Nobody is perfect. Instead, seek to be a good person and to achieve goals.

Learn to appreciate yourself. Everyone has strengths, weaknesses, habits, and principles that define who you are and can make you distinctive. Spend more time focusing on the qualities about yourself that you like and less on the ones that you dislike. You can better accomplish this by taking up hobbies and projects that you can do, which will make use of your strengths. Additionally, by starting on some projects that emphasize your good traits, it will keep you busy, so you spend less time thinking about your weaknesses. It also makes you feel like you've accomplished something—great confidence booster!

Reward yourself when you succeed. Treat yourself to something nice. Bask in the glow of your successes. Believe in yourself completely and others will also believe and trust in you.

--Dr. Jamie