

Self-esteem

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Self-esteem is how you feel about yourself in relation to others. These feelings can change if you get or lose a job, go to a new school or graduate, get married or divorced, gain or lose weight, or become a parent. Self-esteem can be positive (you love, respect and trust yourself) or negative (you feel insecure and helpless).

How you react to situations can be affected by your self-esteem. With good self-esteem, you may handle a difficult situation with grace and confidence. With low self-esteem, you may handle a difficult situation with a lack of both focus and trust in yourself.

Good Self-esteem

If you have good self-esteem, you value and respect yourself, embrace your good qualities and shine with confidence. Other qualities of good self-esteem include:

- You tolerate others and their points of view.
- You have a sense of self-worth.
- You feel needed and loved.
- You continually work on turning negative thoughts or negative comments into areas of potential growth.
- You are kind to yourself.
- You make good choices about career, food, money and relationships.
- You have healthy relationships.
- You enjoy doing activities with friends and family.

- You have family values and morals.
- You strive for personal goals.
- You feel good about how you look (body image).
- You are involved in activities, hobbies, volunteer opportunities or all three.

Low Self-esteem

You may have bouts of low-self-esteem where you just do not feel good about yourself. Low self-esteem that does not go away can be dangerous. It can play a role in depression and eating disorders. It can also lead to substance abuse.

If you have low self-esteem, you may not value and respect yourself. You may not feel good about how you look. Other qualities of low self-esteem include:

- You might try to “fit in” somewhere only to feel out of place, awkward or shunned.
- You do not feel special, interesting or unique.
- You let others affect you and your mood (boss, co-worker, partner, teacher, child).
- You listen to and believe your own negative thoughts, or put-downs or criticism from others.
- You are critical of your actions, words and work.
- You have a decreased interest in activities.
- You make unhealthy choices in friends or relationships.

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- You may turn to substances (alcohol, illegal drugs) or food to make you feel better.
- You do not feel good about how you look.
- You may feel depressed.

Self-esteem Begins in Childhood

Self-esteem forms in early childhood. How parents, adults and peers react to a child can influence or affect how that child views himself or herself.

To develop good self-esteem in children, parents need to create a safe environment and teach their children to be responsible and respectful, have goals, express their feelings and know when to ask for help.

Parents should let children try new skills such as music lessons, sports, helping around the house or reading a challenging book. Praising children for trying a new skill is also important.

As children enter school, they learn to become part of peer groups. With guidance, children should make friends who are kind, thoughtful, safe and healthy. Having good self-esteem is important to keep children from giving in to negative peer pressure.

The pressures of school (middle school, high school or college) can cause students' self-esteem to plunge. Handling academic pressure with good self-esteem can help prevent students from becoming depressed.

How to Boost Self-esteem

- Use positive self-talk, such as "I am resilient, self-confident and capable."
- Accept yourself for who you are. Celebrate what you like. Try to change what you honestly do not like.
- Accept your physical appearance.
- Love and respect yourself for who you are, not who you are not.
- Remind yourself that you are unique, you are special, you are valued, you are important.
- Get out and participate in activities with friends and family members.
- Keep a journal to see which areas in your life need attention.
- Be assertive. State your rights or position without being aggressive or negative.
- Create expectations or goals you can meet.
- Eat healthful foods.
- Be physically active at least 3 to 5 times each week.
- Talk with a trusted friend or family member if you are having feelings of self-doubt. Sometimes, talking about a problem can help solve it.

Physical, emotional or mental abuse has a great affect upon self-esteem. If you are being abused or if you have been abused in the past, know that you do not deserve this. You did not cause it to happen and there is help for you in the community.

For help, call your health care provider or the Minnesota Domestic Violence Crisis Line at 1-866-223-1111. You can also visit dayoneservices.org.