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Self-Esteem & You – The Basics of Self-Esteem

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Issued February 1985

4 pages

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# Self-Esteem & You

## I. THE BASICS OF SELF-ESTEEM

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Take a moment and consider what you think of yourself. Try to see yourself as clearly as possible, focusing in on your true view of who you are. Once you do that, determine how much you like or dislike that person.

What this process results in is a look into your self-esteem -- how much you think you're worth as a person. Because your self-esteem affects every aspect of your life, it is beneficial to improve negative feelings of self-worth. While this may seem a self-centered task, developing self-esteem is crucial because it affects your relationships with others. In a society where divorce rates are spiraling, illegitimate births are at an all-time high, and teenage drug abuse, delinquency and alcoholism are on the rise, the necessity of improving the quality of marriage, family relationships and parenting is painfully evident.

### How Is Self-Esteem Developed?

You do not inherit self-esteem or develop it instinctively. Self-esteem is something you learn and develop as you mature. It is your feelings of worthiness or unworthiness, based on your experiences with those who play significant roles in your life. Parents and teachers are the main forces in shaping these feelings in the early years. Later, friends, co-workers and your spouse and children take on this role.

The conditions under which we live also affect our self-esteem. As noted by Stanley Coopersmith in The Antecedent of Self-Esteem, there are three conditions which encourage a developing person to value and regard himself or herself as an object of worth:

- Parental Warmth -- where



children sense the love and concern of their family and feel that family members see them as persons of value.

- Respectful Treatment -- where children's views are considered and where they have a rightful and democratic position in the family.

- Clearly Defined Limits -- whereby children come to know through parents' relatively high demands and expectations for success that they care about what happens to the children.

In a later report, Coopersmith

lists several factors which do not appear to be associated with the development of high self-esteem:

- Amount of punishment.
- Amount of time spent with parents.
- Physical attractiveness.
- Ethnic background.
- Height.
- Education.
- Income.
- Social class.

### What Self-Esteem Means In Your Life

You may think your self-esteem is something that only you need know about. In reality, however, your actions and personality are direct reflections of how much you value yourself.

Dorothy Briggs, a family counselor and author, has listed some characteristic behaviors of people with different levels of self-esteem. As you read through them and consider yourself and those you know, be sure to remember that the characteristics listed are only guides to helping you understand the different levels of self-esteem.

### High Self-Esteem

A person with high self-esteem may ...

- often assume an active and effective role in social groups.
- be eager to express self.
- often get involved with others.
- be more likely to be creative and self-confident.
- be physically healthy and happy.
- be willing to try new things.
- have a sense of humor.
- have a positive outlook.

--not be supersensitive to criticism.

### Medium Self-Esteem

A person with a medium level of self-esteem may ...

- be optimistic.
- be uncertain about self-worth.
- seek recognition to erase self-doubt.
- tend toward conformity.
- be expressive.
- be able to take criticism.
- be quite dependent upon social acceptance. (Not as adventuresome as those with high self-esteem.)



### Low Self-Esteem

A person with low self-esteem may ...

- feel unloved and be convinced of his or her inferiority.
- be a perfectionist and have unrealistically high expectations of him or herself.
- fear social encounters.
- be easily discouraged.
- feel isolated, on the sidelines.
- frequently sees self as helpless, inferior and incapable of improving his or her situation.
- be highly sensitive to criticism.

## Can I Change My Self-Esteem?

Yes! One's feelings of self-esteem are not only changeable, but have unlimited capacity for growth. In her book, People-making, Virginia Satir says it is possible to raise your feelings of self-worth at any age. But the change takes time, of course, just as it took time for your feelings of self-worth to develop in the first place. Especially as you grow older, it's unrealistic to expect sudden or dramatic changes in the way you feel about yourself. But change is possible, given time and effort.

### Getting Your Self-Esteem "In Shape"

Just as you can work to get your physical self in shape, so you can also develop your self-image. Dr. Don Hamachek, in the second edition of his book, Encounters with the Self, suggests the following ideas for building and maintaining positive feelings of self-worth.

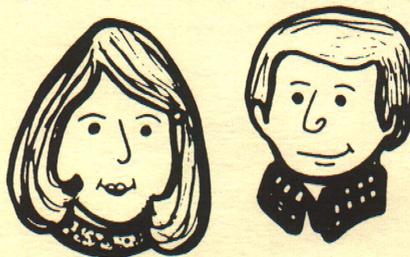
1) WORK ON SELF-OTHER UNDERSTANDING -- Get to know yourself and others as the one-of-a-kind individuals you are. A good way to do this is to try to understand yourself by observing others. And try to understand others by looking at yourself.

To work on this, you might:

★ Try to become more in tune with other people by attempting to see, hear and feel what they have experienced.

★ Be honest about yourself and your feelings with other people. Doing this will force you to be honest with yourself about your

inner feelings and will aid communication with others.



★ Listen to others. Try to understand what they are telling you and let them know you understand by putting their feelings in your own words. Do not judge or criticize.

2) ACCEPT YOURSELF -- Know and like who you are. You will begin to feel this way when the person you ARE is not too far from the person you WOULD LIKE TO BE. This feeling should come from within yourself, not from the praise of others.

To achieve this self-acceptance, choose your values wisely. The things that are important to you should be those that you can realistically attain. Your values should also challenge you to continued improvement.

For example, it wouldn't make much sense to value good looks above all else, if you're only moderately attractive but have woodworking or handicraft skills. You'd probably feel better about yourself if you would concentrate on your talents and put physical appearance down a bit farther on your list of values.

★ Compensate for your shortcomings by exploring your abilities in other areas. For example, if you have a poor singing voice, it would not make

much sense to pursue a concert career. It would make more sense to develop the skills you may have in working with young people, for example. You might become a teacher instead. We are all good at something; few are good at everything!

★ Know that you can better yourself. Remember that your goal is not to become a perfect person, but to become a better person.

#### Adequate Self-Esteem --

#### When Do I Need 'It'?

Knowing and liking yourself should be a daily experience.

As Dr. Hamachek also notes in his book, Encounters with the Self:

*"In the daily struggle to cope with the requirements of self and of reality and to deal firmly with threats, frustrations, and conflicts, we must have a firm grip on our own identity. Indeed, the admonition to "Know thyself" has been passed down through the ages as the criterion of wisdom and peace of mind until our present day where it has emerged from a religious-philosophical notion into a slogan for better mental health."*

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Issued in furtherance of cooperative extension work in agriculture and home economics, acts of May 8, and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Gordon E. Guyer, Director, Cooperative Extension Service, Michigan State University, E. Lansing, MI 48824.

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