How To Improve Your Self Esteem

The ways in which we think about ourselves are critical, and it is through healthy self esteem that we can realize our full potential. While there are many misconceptions about and differing definitions of self esteem, perhaps the most helpful is that of Nathaniel Branden (1994): *Self esteem is the disposition to experience oneself as competent to cope with the basic challenges of life and as worthy of happiness.* It includes the capacities to know who we are and to trust ourselves.

The level of our self-esteem has consequences on every area of our life: at school, work, and home. It can impact how much we achieve, how we relate to other people, and what level of happiness we achieve. The following are correlates with self esteem (Branden, 1994):

**People with high self esteem are:**

- Rational and realistic
- Flexible
- Intuitive & creative
- Able to manage change
- Independent
- Willing to admit mistakes
- Benevolent and cooperative
- Happier

**People with low self esteem are:**

- Irrational and blind to reality
- Rigid
- Exhibit over compliant or over controlling behavior
- Fearful of the new and unfamiliar
- Inappropriately conforming or inappropriately rebellious
- Defensive
- Fearful of or hostile toward others
- Unhappier

Anecdotally, the higher our self esteem, the more nourishing our relationships are thought to be. Insecure in their relationships, people with low self esteem may be easily influenced or manipulated by others. Individuals with low self esteem are more prone to discount their ideas and can be excessively dependent on the feedback and validation of others. Because of uncertainty about their thoughts and/or anxiety about the listener’s response, communication may be more unclear. Moreover, encounters may be approached with expectations of rejection, humiliation, or betrayal.

Self-esteem creates a set of expectations about what is possible for us, which generates actions that can turn possibilities into realities either positively or negatively.
While many people have the talent, energy and drive to achieve a great deal, in spite of feelings of inadequacy or unworthiness, there will often be a sense that it is not “enough.” Sometimes people have many successes, are widely esteemed by others, or have a public veneer of assurance, yet are deeply dissatisfied, anxious or depressed. “Pseudo” self esteem is a self-protective attempt to diminish anxiety and gain a sense of security. Any attempt to seek self-esteem outside ourselves – through popularity or material acquisitions, for example, will not achieve that end. The ultimate source of self esteem is internal.

If you recognize some of the traits of low self-esteem, do not despair: self esteem can be developed. Branden identifies six practices that lead to the development of self-esteem. A word of caution: do not aim for “perfection”; if you raise your average level of performance in these domains, you will experience growth in your self esteem.

The Six Pillars of Self Esteem:

**Living Consciously:** Bring more awareness to your activities, avoiding the impulse to deny painful realities.

**Self-Acceptance:** Choose to value yourself and be compassionate toward yourself.

**Self-Responsibility:** Recognize that you are responsible for your life and your happiness.

**Self-Assertiveness:** Honor your wants, needs, and values and express them appropriately.

**Living Purposefully:** Use your powers to attain your goals.

**Personal Integrity:** Integrate your ideals, standards, beliefs – and behavior.

Here are some additional suggestions to build your self esteem.

- Brag a little. When you do something good, tell close family members and friends about it.
- Read motivational poems and readings.
- Do good things for you, and give yourself little rewards, like listening to music you enjoy, going for a walk, or playing basketball.
- Surround yourself with treasures people give you, such as cards or photos. This can remind you that you have people who care about you.
- Write a list of all the good things you do and keep it in your wallet.
- Dress nicely, this includes fun and funky.
- Live each day to the fullest. Get the most from each stage of your life. Then you can look forward with confidence and back without regrets.
- Be yourself, but be your best self. Dare to be different and to follow your own star.
- Don’t be afraid to be happy. Enjoy what is beautiful. Love with all your heart and soul.
- Utilize affirmations, such as those on the following page.
Affirmations
My Declaration of self-esteem: I AM ME  By Virginia Satir

In the entire world there is no one exactly like me. Everything that comes out of me is authentically mine because alone I choose it. I own everything about me—my body, my feelings, my mouth, my voice, all my actions, whether they be to others or to myself. I own my fantasies, my dreams, my hopes, and my fears. I own all my triumphs and successes, all my failures and mistakes. Because I own all of me, I can become intimately acquainted with me. By doing so, I can love me and be friendly with me in all my parts. I know there are aspects about myself that puzzle me, and other aspects that I do not know, but as long as I am friendly and loving to myself, I can courageously and hopefully look for solutions to the puzzles and for ways to find out more about me. However, I look and sound, whatever I say and do, and whatever I think and feel at a given moment in time is authentically me. If later, some parts of how I looked, sounded, thought, and felt turn out to be unfitting, I can discard that which is unfitting, keep the rest, and invent something new for that which I discard. I can see, hear, feel, think, say, and do. I have the tools to survive, to be close to others, to be productive, and to make sense and order out of the world of people and things outside of me. I own me, and therefore, I can engineer me. I am me and I am okay.

About The Self:

You are enrolled in a full-time informal school called life. Each day in this school you will have the opportunity to learn lessons.

There is no part of life that does not contain its lesson. If you are alive, there are lessons to be learned.

A lesson is repeated until learned. A lesson will be presented to you in various forms until you have learned it.

When you have learned it, you can then go to the next lesson.

What you make of your life is up to you. You have all the tools and resources that you need; what you do with them is up to you. The choice is yours.

The answers to life’s questions lie inside you. It is important that you look, listen, and trust.

References:


Self Esteem retrieved August 21, 2005, from

www.cybercill.com/skills/esteem.html