

Building Confidence and Self-Esteem

17 simple suggestions for building confidence and self-esteem

By Neel Burton, M.D. in *Hide and Seek*



Self-esteem is affected by physical ill-health, negative life events such as losing your job or getting divorced, deficient or frustrating relationships, and a general sense of lack of control. This sense of lack of control is often particularly marked in people who are the victims of emotional, physical or sexual abuse, or of discrimination on the grounds of religion, culture, race, sex or sexual orientation.

Sometimes poor self-esteem can be deeply rooted and have its origins in traumatic childhood experiences such as prolonged separation from parent figures, neglect, or emotional, physical, or sexual abuse. If you think this is a particular problem for you, speak to a mental healthcare professional. Therapy or counseling may enable you to talk about such experiences and to try to come to terms with them. Unfortunately, therapy or counseling may be difficult to obtain, and may not be suitable for everyone.

Low self-esteem can predispose you to developing a mental disorder, and developing a mental disorder can in turn deliver a huge knock to your self-esteem. In some cases, **low self-esteem is in itself a cardinal feature of mental disorder, for example, in depression or in borderline personality disorder.** The relationship between low self-esteem and mental disorder is complex, and a person with a mental disorder is more likely than most to suffer from long-term low self-esteem.

People with long-term low self-esteem generally see the world as a hostile place and themselves as its victim. As a result, they feel reluctant to express and assert themselves, miss out on experiences and opportunities, and feel helpless about changing things. All this merely lowers their self-esteem even further, and they end up getting caught in a downward spiral.

Thankfully, there are a number of simple things that anyone can do to boost his or her self-esteem and hopefully break out of this vicious circle. You may already be doing some of these things and you certainly don't need to do them all. Just do those that you feel most comfortable with.

1. Make three lists: one of your strengths, one of your achievements, and one of the things that you admire about yourself. Try to get a friend or relative to help you with these lists. Keep the lists in a safe place and read through them regularly.
2. Think positively about yourself. Remind yourself that, despite your problems, you are a unique, special, and valuable person and that you deserve to feel good about yourself. Identify and challenge any negative thoughts that you may have about yourself, such as 'I am a loser', 'I never do anything right', or 'No one really likes me'.
3. Pay special attention to your personal hygiene: for example, style your hair, trim your nails, floss your teeth.
4. Dress in clothes that make you feel good about yourself.
5. Eat good food as part of a healthy, balanced diet. Make meal times a special time, even if you are eating alone. Turn off the TV or radio, set the table, and arrange your food so that it looks attractive on your plate.



6. **Exercise regularly:** go out for a brisk walk every day, and take more vigorous exercise (exercise that makes you break into a sweat) three times a week.
7. **Ensure that you are getting enough sleep.**
8. **Manage your stress levels.** If possible, agree with a close friend or relative that you will take turns to massage each other on a regular basis.
9. **Make your living space clean, comfortable, and attractive.** Display items that remind you of your achievements or of the special times and people in your life.
10. **Do more of the things that you enjoy doing.** Do at least one thing that you enjoy every day, and remind yourself that you deserve it.

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