Healthy Self-Esteem

Self-esteem refers to the subjective evaluation of ourselves, our worth, and our perceived value – or simply, how we think and feel about ourselves. It encompasses our perceptions of our own competence, attractiveness, and likability.

Healthy self-esteem involves having a balanced and realistic view of ourselves – we feel confident in our abilities, respect ourselves despite imperfections, and acknowledge areas of weakness objectively. Low self-esteem is generally when someone has a negative overall opinion of themselves or their level of competence, attractiveness, or likability, resulting in negatively judging their self-value and worth.

Why is Self-Esteem Important?

Self-esteem is fundamental in shaping how we perceive ourselves, interact with others, and navigate the world around us. In particular, it shapes our:

- Emotional Wellbeing: healthy self-esteem contributes to emotional resilience and stability, helping us cope with life's challenges and criticisms more effectively.
- Relationships: when individuals feel good about themselves, they are better able to form secure attachments, assert their needs, and engage in mutual respect and support.
- Achievement: people with healthy self-esteem are more likely to set and pursue meaningful goals. They believe in their ability to succeed and are less deterred by failure or setbacks.

- Mental Health: cultivating healthy self-esteem can serve as a protective factor against mental ill-health, including depression, anxiety and eating disorders.
- Self-care: individuals with positive self-esteem are more likely to prioritise self-care and engage in behaviours that promote their wellbeing.

What is Negative Self-Esteem?

Negative self-esteem is complex. It can be a symptom of an underlying mental health condition such as depression. Other times, low self-esteem can be influenced by a combination of internal and external factors, such as:

- Early Experiences: negative experiences during childhood, such as abuse, neglect, or criticism from caregivers, can significantly impact self-esteem, and lead to feelings of unworthiness and inadequacy
- Social Comparison: comparing ourselves unfavourably to others' appearances, achievements, or possessions, can erode self-esteem. Exposure to idealised images on social media can also exacerbate low self-worth
- Traumatic Events: experiencing traumatic events, such as bullying, rejection, or failure, can lead to feelings of shame, self-doubt, and a distorted self-image
- Perfectionism: striving for perfection and setting unrealistic standards for oneself can result in chronic feelings of failure and inadequacy

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- Negative Feedback: receiving consistent negative feedback from peers, authority figures, or society can undermine self-esteem. Criticism, ridicule, or rejection can also reinforce negative feelings of worthlessness
- Internalised Messages: internalising negative messages from society, culture, or media about our identity, body image, or abilities can impact self-esteem. These messages may perpetuate stereotypes, biases, and unrealistic standards
- Lack of Support: lacking supportive relationships or a sense of belonging can hinder healthy self-esteem. Without encouragement, validation, and positive reinforcement from others, individuals may struggle to see their own worth.

Building Positive Self-Esteem

Addressing and challenging the above underlying causes is essential in rebuilding and nurturing healthy self-esteem. This process can take time and effort. Remember to have patience in this journey towards self-acceptance and confidence and that the judgements we make about ourselves are opinions.

Practising Self-Compassion:

Be gentle with yourself during difficult times. Treat yourself with the same kindness and understanding you would offer a friend facing a challenge.

Engage in Self-Care:

Prioritise activities that promote your physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. This may include exercise, hobbies, relaxation techniques, and spending time with loved ones.

Limit Comparisons:

Avoid comparing yourself to others. Focus on your own journey and progress, rather than constantly measuring yourself against others.

Challenge Negative Thoughts:

Pay attention to your inner dialogue and challenge negative self-talk. Replace self-critical thoughts with more balanced and realistic statements.

Acknowledge your Strengths:

Make a list of your positive qualities, talents, and accomplishments. Remind yourself of these strengths regularly to reinforce a positive self-image.

Embrace Imperfection:

Accept that nobody is perfect. Making mistakes is a natural part of learning and growth.

Practice Assertiveness:

Express your thoughts, feelings, and needs respectfully. Setting boundaries and standing up for yourself can boost self-confidence.

Practice Gratitude:

Regularly reflect on the things you are grateful for in your life. Cultivating gratitude can shift your focus from what you lack to what you already have.

Seek Support

Surround yourself with supportive friends and family, or contact EAP for additional support in helping you develop more positive self-esteem and confidence so you can thrive.