

SELF-ESTEEM

Self-esteem is having positive as well as realistic attitudes of oneself and the events that are encountered throughout life.

People with high self-esteem are confident of their abilities; have sense of control in their lives, are open to criticism; have realistic expectations; in a rational perspective, believe that most of their plans will be realized. When some of their expectations do not come true, they continue to be positive and to accept themselves.

People with low self-esteem are dependent on other's approval to feel good about themselves. They avoid taking risks because of the possibility of failure. Generally they don't expect to succeed. They have a degraded view of themselves and they either ignore compliments or don't take them seriously.

How does self-esteem develop?

There are a lot of factors that affect the development of self-esteem. Especially at early ages, the attitude of parents is crucial for the feelings of the children about themselves.

Low self-esteem has nothing to do with being untalented. Low self-esteem generally stems from what we learn in childhood and from the overemphasis of people outside, especially family and society, on the irrational standards and expectations. Furthermore, our friends' thoughts are very important in shaping our self-view.

However, we sometimes mistakenly attribute our low self-esteem to external factors. On the other hand, sometimes when our self-esteem increases or decreases, our perception of the environment changes. Because how we feel is one of the main factors that determine how we perceive and interpret the events.

Usually we may not be aware of how our self-esteem develops and affects our perceptions.

Assumptions that affect self-esteem:

Some assumptions may negatively affect self-esteem. There are examples below for these assumptions and alternative ways of thinking:

Assumption: I always have to be loved and approved by all important people in my life.

Alternative: It is realistic and desirable to develop personal standards and values that are not totally dependent of other people.

Assumption: I have to be skilled, adequate and successful in all areas of my life.

Alternative: Success is satisfactory but it does not make you more worthy as a person. One is born with his/her self-worth.

Assumption: My past continues to be important in my life and to control everything I feel and do today.

Alternative: Our self-esteem is open to external influences, especially during childhood; however, we develop awareness about these influences as we grow up. By this way, we can choose which influences will interfere with our life. We are not helpless about our past.

Mistaken Thoughts that Decrease Self-esteem

All-or-Nothing: "If my performance is not perfect, I'm a total failure"

Generalization: "I always fail.", "Nobody loves me"

Seeing only the dark clouds: A bit of negative or criticism darkens the whole reality. "I've got a C from the exam, I won't be able to graduate"

Exaggerating the negative / Ignoring the positive: "I won 5 chess games in a row, but if I loose this one I will feel terrible"

Accepting the emotions as reality: "I feel ugly today, that means I'm ugly"

Overemphasizing should and shouldn'ts: "should/shouldn't" statements are generally perfectionist and include others' expectations rather than your wishes. "Everyone attending university should have career plan. I don't have one. So, there is something wrong with me".

Labeling: Labeling is a simplified process and it includes self-blame. "I'm stupid and it's my fault" Having difficulty with accepting compliments: "Did you like this dress?!? I think it makes me look fat."

What can I do?

- **Emphasize your strengths:** Praise yourself for everything you try and your efforts. Do not focus on the outcome.
- **Take risks:** Approach new experiences as opportunities to learn, rather than win-loose situations. Thus, you will be more open to experience and more comfortable with accepting yourself.

- **Do not label:** Avoid labeling yourself with negative adjectives.
- **Talk to yourself:** When you start thinking negatively about yourself, say “stop”, and start thinking about more realistic assumptions. Remind yourself that it is impossible to do everything perfectly; the important thing is to try and do your best.
- **Evaluate yourself:** Learn to freely evaluate yourself. By this means you will be able to learn the weaknesses you can change and praise your strengths.

For More Information

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