

Self-esteem

Most people assume self-esteem is the same as self-confidence, and although self-confidence is related, it's not the same. Self-confident people may also suffer from low self-esteem, for example, actors, celebrities and public figures in our society today that appear to be totally self-confident may have poor self-esteem off stage or away from the media attention.

In Latin, esteem actually means 'to estimate', so self-esteem is often defined as how you estimate yourself. Individuals with low self-esteem usually find it difficult to answer 'yes' to questions such as 'do I like myself?', 'do I feel I deserve to be loved?', 'do I think I'm a good person' and 'do I deserve to be happy?'.

Low self esteem is quite common in today's society and those who accept a limited sense of self worth may be more prone to drug or alcohol abuse as they struggle to find their worth in the world. Low self-esteem may also lead to feeling depressed and hopeless, and thinking negatively about yourself and your right to happiness. However, for lots of people there is help available to change negative thinking patterns and there are many strategies and techniques available to build self esteem.

Most people experience low self esteem at some point in their life (e.g. if they lose their job or relationship) but they can also experience high self esteem at other points in their life (e.g. if they are promoted, successfully complete a challenge or fall in love). However, those who can't bounce back after their self esteem has been bruised, and constantly feel negatively about themselves, may be suffering from chronic low self-esteem.

Common signs of low self-esteem

This includes include feeling tired a lot of the time and having little motivation to get things done, feeling bored with life and feeling you don't have much to look forward to, thinking a lot about yourself and wishing your life was better, thinking negatively about your abilities and possible opportunities, feeling like a failure or feeling hopeless and depressed.

Causes of low self-esteem

Generalisations about low self esteem include:

Early years are considered particularly important in establishing our self-esteem and our family is a strong force in the development of our individual self-esteem. High self-esteem in parents can be used to nurture children's self-esteem

How an individual develops their self-esteem during their time at school can also be an important factor in their sense of worth. Those who develop high self-esteem during this time are generally less likely to engage in destructive behaviour such as alcohol and drug abuse and crime.

Our own natural personality and the messages and influences we receive from everyone around us about how we should act and feel can affect our self-esteem.

High self esteem has to be sought by the individual themselves and can't be 'given' to a person. An individual must actively seek to improve their own self-esteem if they are to build their sense of worth.

Help for low self-esteem

Therapy or counselling can often help those suffering from low self-esteem and help develop a sense of self to ensure a more fulfilling life. Some individuals may benefit from dance, music, painting or creative writing to find a sense of empowerment within themselves. Support groups on assertiveness or building self-esteem are also widely available in the UK.

Sometimes keeping a journal to explore past negative memories may help individuals relate to how these are causing them difficulties now. Taking care of your physical health, exercising, reducing stress levels and accepting a realistic challenge can also help towards building self-esteem.

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