

## Self-esteem: Building Self-worth & Confidence

Self-esteem is the perception of one's own intrinsic worth, based on thoughts, beliefs, and life experiences. People with healthy self-esteem feel good about themselves, value their skills and talents, respect their own intelligence and act on their beliefs and feelings. People with low self-esteem - unable to accurately assess their strengths and weaknesses - often judge themselves harshly and negatively. While healthy self-esteem brings a sense of confidence and accomplishment, low self-esteem can greatly impact the quality of an individual's relationships, work or studies. Low self-esteem can keep you from enjoying life, doing the things you want to do, and working toward personal goals.

### What causes low self-esteem?

The causes of low self-esteem are many and varied. It can result from depression, guilt, self-doubt, prolonged misfortune and ongoing failures, or trying to live up to unrealistic standards. Self-esteem can also be related to that which others think of us; we tend to believe the perceptions of others, right or wrong.

### What are the effects of low self-esteem?

Your self-image is extremely important in maintaining a healthy mind and lifestyle. If you are constantly questioning or doubting yourself, you may be creating conditions for one or more of the following effects of low self-esteem:

- Social anxiety
- Depression
- Lack of confidence
- Lack of motivation or goals
- Procrastination
- Negative, unrealistic view of self and others
- Limiting beliefs
- Trouble forming healthy relationships
- Overly dependent on others
- Anger management issues

### Watch your self-talk

Your thoughts shape your moods. If your thoughts are causing you to criticize yourself, to feel angry toward others or interfere with your relationships at work or school, it may be beneficial to realize that your thoughts are just that, only thoughts. They are reflections, observations, and opinions over which you ultimately have the power to control.

### Changing the damaging effects of negative self-talk through mindfulness

Thoughts can be altered, transformed and changed in order to help you feel better, more positive and more hopeful. Becoming aware of your thoughts is the first step. Mindfulness is an activity in which a person becomes intentionally aware of his or her thoughts and actions in the present moment, non-judgmentally, and intentionally replaces negative thoughts with more constructive and positive ones. The following suggestions can increase mindfulness and reduce negativity:

1. *Learn to be optimistic* - react to setbacks from a presumption of personal power by recognizing that bad events are temporary setbacks, isolated to particular circumstances, and can be overcome by your effort and abilities.
2. *Maximize the positive and minimize the negative* - Thoughts grow with attention. If you focus on negative thoughts, they will grow and become larger. Focusing on the positive will deflate self-limiting and self-defeating thoughts, thus, empowering you.
3. *Activate hope* - Believing that you have positive strengths and talents allows you to feel good about yourself, even through stressful times, because you can pull from a bank of resources that make you uniquely you.
4. *Drop "should have" from your vocabulary* - Avoid using "should have" statements that keep you embroiled in regret and guilt. No amount of 'should have' thinking can change the past, but statements such as: "I can" and "I will" may bring about a better present and future.
5. *Reframe in the moment* - When you find yourself in situations that you feel negative about, try to reframe the moment by generating alternative beliefs, putting the situation in perspective or by creating evidence that contradicts your negative feelings or thoughts.

### Things you can do every day to improve self-esteem

- Pay attention to your own needs and wants.
- Listen to what your body, your mind, and your heart are telling you.
- Take care of yourself - eat a healthy diet, exercise, get enough sleep.
- Take time to do things you enjoy.
- Do things that make use of your own special talents and abilities.
- Spend time with people.
- Make your living space a place that honors the person you are.
- Do things that you know will make you feel better about yourself.
- Do something nice for another person.

### Seek assistance

The Johns Hopkins Student Assistance Program (JHSAP) is committed to assisting students in managing the challenges they face during their academic careers. JHSAP provides support to students in dealing with substance abuse/dependency, personal, academic, and relationship problems.

If feelings of low self-esteem continue to interfere with your ability to be successful, you may benefit from more individualized services. Contact the Johns Hopkins Student Assistance Program (JHSAP) at 443-287-7000 or visit our website for more information: [www.jhsap.org](http://www.jhsap.org).