

## SELF ESTEEM

### Where does self-esteem come from?

Self-esteem starts early. Young children get many messages from their parents or caregivers about who they are and believe these messages. As children get older, other people including sisters & brothers, other family members, family friends, peers, and even strangers add to the picture they have of themselves. If we got positive messages about ourselves as children, chances are we have high self-esteem. If we got negative messages, chances are we have low self-esteem. But even some people who have always received positive feedback still find it hard to feel good about themselves on their own. It really depends on personality characteristics as well as external messages. Social approval and disapproval does affect our feelings about ourselves. People with healthy self-esteem can still be affected by what others think and it is normal to have occasional feelings of low self-esteem.

- High self-esteem contributes to: a positive attitude, good judgment, good problem-solving skills, healthy, close relationships, high energy and confidence in new situations.
- Low self-esteem can lead to: a negative attitude, poor judgment, poor problem-solving skills, dependence in relationships or isolation, low energy (depression), nervousness and anxiety in new situations, eating disorders, drug abuse and suicide.

### Can self-esteem be changed?

The good news is self-esteem can be changed. The self-critical messages you repeat to yourself that harm your self-esteem can be replaced with self-caring, nurturing positive messages. You can learn to accept the parts of yourself that aren't your favorite parts. You can decide when you will accept other people's comments about you, and when you will reject them. You can judge yourself more fairly, with reasonable standards instead of expectations of perfection. BUT, this takes time, hard work, practice, and more practice. Changing how your mind works is really tough, and takes a lot of effort and persistence. To get you started, here are some ideas:

**Question other people's opinions of you.** If someone criticizes you, ask yourself if what this person says is true. People may say negative things about you for all kinds of reasons – you may not have done what they wanted you to do, you may intimidate them, they may be jealous of you. Negative comments about you can really be more about the person who makes them.

**Listen closely to what you say about yourself.** There are many ways that we talk to ourselves and build beliefs about ourselves. Think about your own self-talk as you read Dr Phil's definitions from [www.drphil.com](http://www.drphil.com)

- Internal Dialogue: This is the continuous conversation that you have with yourself about everything that happens to you. This dialogue is constant, happens in real time (at the same rate at which you would speak the words aloud), and provokes a physiological change (with each thought comes a physical reaction).

What do you say to yourself?

- Labeling: Humans tend to organize things into categories. We even categorize other humans by labeling them into groups, subgroups, classes and functions. But were you aware that we label ourselves? For better or worse, these labels have a powerful impact on our perception of self because we tend to "live" the categories we've attached to ourselves ("I'm a loser" or "I'm a winner.")

How do you label yourself?

- Tapes: These are beliefs that have become so deeply ingrained that they "play" automatically in our heads and influence our behavior without our awareness. Unlike labels ("I never win"), tapes have context: "I won't get the promotion because I never win." Tapes are dangerous and potentially self-defeating because they have the power to set you up for a specific outcome.

What are your tapes telling you?

- **Fixed Beliefs:** Fixed beliefs are the beliefs we hold about ourselves, others, and life's circumstances that have been repeated for so long they have become ingrained and are difficult to change.

What are your fixed beliefs?

- **Limiting Beliefs:** Limiting beliefs are the beliefs we have about ourselves that limit what we reach for and achieve. They also cause us to block any conflicting (positive) information while confirming any new negative information.

What are your limiting beliefs?

- **Authentic self:** Your authentic self is the you that can be found at your absolute core. It is the part of you not defined by your job, function or role. It is the composite of all your skills, talents and wisdom. It is all of the things that are uniquely yours and need expression, rather than what you believe you are supposed to be and do.

Are you living a life that is more in tune with your "authentic" self (who you were created to be) or your "fictional" self (who the world has told you to be)?

**Notice the positive things about yourself.** You probably notice all the little things you do "wrong." Well, what about noticing all the little things you do "right"? We tend to brush off acknowledgement of our "good" stuff. If you criticize yourself whenever you're late, then praise yourself when you're on time. If you criticize yourself when you're grumpy toward someone, then praise yourself each time you smile at a passerby, or cheer up a friend, or call your parents just to say hi.

**Work to change the things about yourself that you aren't so happy with.** If you know you aren't friendly in the mornings, try to smile over breakfast. If you catch yourself in little white lies, work on telling the truth even when it's hard.

**Take responsibility for what you do.** If you bounce a check, don't blame the bank. If you get a ticket, don't blame the police officer. Change your own behavior. Realize you made a mistake, accept yourself as a human being who will naturally make some mistakes, BUT learn your lesson, and then move on. By acknowledging responsibility you allow yourself to decide to change the behavior next time, and move past the incident.

*Thought for the day: Grant me the SERENITY to accept the things I cannot change, COURAGE to change the things I can and the WISDOM to know the difference.*

**My TO DO list for a positive body image from the "I Am Beautiful Project" at:**

<http://iambeautiful.com/tips.htm>

- Think honestly about how I am beautiful. Write it down and refer to it on occasion.
- Put my scale away and truly know that my beauty is NOT measured in pounds.
- I will be critical of advertising and media images that look "perfect". Models and movie stars are retouched to look the way they do. I will be conscious of the number of times I am exposed to these advertising messages that are designed to make me feel inferior.
- Today I will not criticize myself at all. Then I will try it for a week, and longer. Soon the negative messages will be replaced with positive ones.
- When others criticize themselves, I will point out their positive features. Negative statements are self-defeating for everyone.
- I want to be around people who are comfortable with themselves and their appearance.
- Make a list: 5 of my physical features and 5 personality traits that I appreciate, 5 things I am grateful for and 5 achievements that I am particularly proud of. Post this on my bathroom mirror.
- Wear clothes that I like and that feel comfortable.
- Pamper myself with a massage, a bath and candles, a new lipstick or hair clip- something that will make me feel good about myself and rejuvenated.
- I realize that constantly talking about calories, diets, area of my body and wrinkles sends a message especially to young girls and friends that these things are more important than they really are.
- I will celebrate my own unique beauty and the inherent beauty in all women!

Try these suggestions. But if you have very low self-esteem and you think you need some help to feel better about yourself, call the Counseling Center on campus at 882-6601 and make an appointment to see a therapist. Talking about your feelings may help, and having someone to guide you through the change process may make things a little easier for you.