



Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service
Oklahoma State University

Pathways to Success

A Basic Living Skills Curriculum

Building Self-Esteem

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Building Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is what you believe you are worth as a person. Every human being is a one of a kind creation. Each person is worth respect. Some people are sure of themselves while others feel unsure.



Having low self-esteem keeps us from being all we can be. You may be unsure of your ability because you may have been taught to believe you don't deserve good things. This bad or negative thinking can make you feel even worse.

Check Your Self-Esteem

Read through each of the following statements. Put a 'T' in the space provided if you believe the statement is true for you. Leave the space blank if it is not true for you.

1. ___ I can admit a mistake.
2. ___ I can talk to people I don't know.
3. ___ I do what I believe is right even if others don't approve.
4. ___ I can accept a compliment and not feel uncomfortable.
5. ___ I can be myself around other people.
6. ___ I can accept myself with all my faults and weaknesses.
7. ___ I can tell you my strengths.
8. ___ I can feel happy for someone else when he or she succeeds.
9. ___ I do not compare myself with others.
10. ___ I have peace of mind.
11. ___ I believe I am unique.
12. ___ I accept differences in others without judging them.
13. ___ I compliment others.
14. ___ I can say "I love you" to all the people I love.
15. ___ I love myself.
16. ___ I am comfortable being alone.

Count the number of statements you marked *True*. If you have 11 or more trues, you have high self-esteem. Answering true to 6-10 statements puts you in average self-esteem. 5 or fewer trues indicates low self-esteem. No matter the score on the checklist, you can learn to feel better about yourself.

Reprinted by permission from Barbara Braham, *Self-Esteem and Getting Ahead*

How can a person develop better self-esteem?

Feelings about self-esteem are formed in childhood. If someone who took care of you (mother, grandparent, friend or babysitter) saw the good in you, you probably already have fairly good self-esteem. If you weren't that lucky, thinking well of yourself will probably take more work, but you can learn to do it.



Try this exercise:

Choose one item from the self-esteem checklist.

For one week try to do that item every chance you get. See how you feel when you act that way. How do others treat you?

Things you can do to like yourself more.

Learn to give to others.

Help others.



For example,

Janie likes her job at the thrift store because she gets the chance to help people who really need help. She says, “When I’m doing good for other people, I don’t worry about my own problems as much. I want to help them and I feel good when I do just that!”



Develop your own support group.

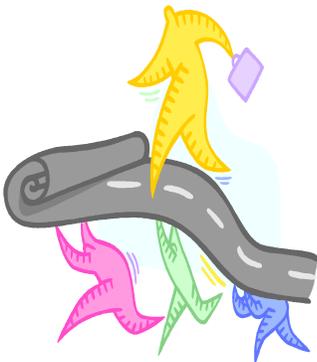
There are people who like you and care about what happens to you. Know who they are, and keep in touch with them, and let them know you care about them as well.

Take action

Do what you can do and don't worry about what you can't do.

Here's how one woman answered someone who said something bad about people of other races:

“There were times when people would make mean remarks around me, and they expected me to laugh. But if I felt it was rude, I would say so. I would do it nicely, in a very direct way. I would not do it loudly and I would not curse.”



Take care of yourself. Eat right, take time for yourself, do what you think is right, don't worry so much about pleasing others. Doing things that we know are bad for us lowers self-esteem. People with low self-esteem often work hard to please others, trying to buy their respect or attention. People respect others who are true to themselves.

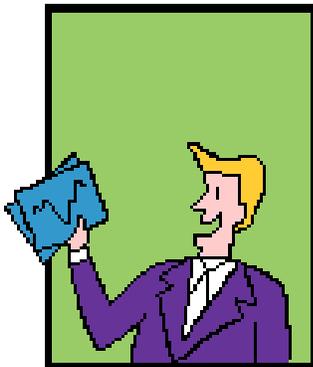
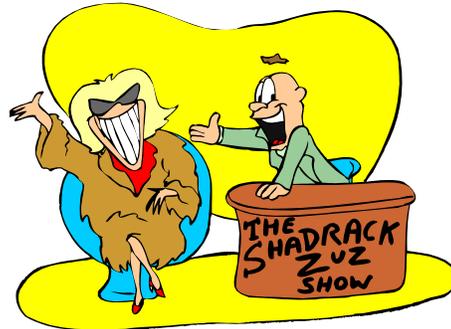
Try new things. Learn to swim or ride a
bike. Take a class. Be brave enough to
take chances.



Be proud of your success! Set yourself up to
win. Do the things you can do. If your plan is to
get into shape, 10 minutes of TV-exercise
program every day is a good place to start.

Use positive self-talk

Everyone has heard bad messages from somewhere. The more you've heard "you're so dumb," "you're ugly," "you're a loser," "you'll never amount to anything," the more you'll hear that over and over in your own head.



Your job is to *unlearn* those bad messages. You may keep hearing them for a while, but stop listening and stop believing them. Tell yourself that you're okay, that you *can* do it. You're growing and learning and getting better day by day.

At first you may feel clumsy and even fake doing this, but you will become more comfortable and happy as being good to yourself becomes the natural thing to do.



What types of things were you saying to yourself as you waited for the instructor to ask for volunteers? Were you jumping up and down hoping to be called on or were you trying to hide, hoping not to be noticed? If you were hoping not to be noticed, what thoughts were going through your mind? “Oh, not me, I’ll just mess it up!” “I hate being put on the spot.” “I know I’ll be the one, I have no luck!” “I am such a loser!”



Negative Statements

1. _____
2. _____

Catch negative thoughts before they do more damage. You can silence those negative words by listening to your positive thoughts. Create a kind inside voice if you don’t already have one.

Every time a person says, “I can’t,” “I’m afraid,” “People will think I’m stupid,” “Someone hates me,” levels of self-confidence and self-respect drop. Replace your bad or negative comments with positive ones. Doing this takes effort at first. It’s often necessary to stop in mid-sentence and say, “No, this isn’t true. I won’t think like this!” Choose to say something good instead of something bad. A helpful book about how to change thought patterns is by David Burns, *The Feeling Good Handbook*.



Go back to the negative statements you wrote down earlier and change those negative thoughts. Mark a line through them and write something positive instead. Think of good things about yourself. Include skills and abilities you have, nice personal qualities, etc. The more you do this the better you will become.

Here's a list of idea-starters.

Circle those words that apply to you. Write others you can think of in the spaces below.

<i>Loyal</i>	<i>Hard-working</i>	<i>Thinks of others</i>	<i>Honest</i>	
<i>Loves kids</i>	<i>Clean</i>	<i>Giving</i>	<i>Good appearance</i>	
<i>Manners</i>	<i>Smart</i>	<i>Friendly</i>	<i>Kind</i>	<i>Can be trusted</i>
<i>Habits</i>	<i>Good talker</i>	<i>Talents</i>	<i>Healthy</i>	<i>On time</i>

Other good things about me:

1. _____ 2. _____
3. _____ 4. _____



Self-Esteem Building Activities

Self-esteem also increases when we are valued by others.

Class exercise: Take turns saying one nice thing about another person in the class. For example, “Jennifer, I liked what you had to say about standing up for yourself when your friend was mean. That took courage.”



‘Reminder Card’ activity.

We all need to know that someone else thinks well of us.



Divide up into groups of three or four. Write your name at the top of your note card then pass it to the person on your left. Each person writes something good (a word or a short sentence) about the person whose name is at the top of the card, then sign your name. Pass that card to the person on your left, and repeat until the cards return to their owners. Keep your card in your purse or pocket, to remind yourself of the good things others see in you.

Remember, developing self-esteem takes time. You can learn to be more confident and content.

Building your self-esteem is not a selfish act. It's an important step to a happier way of life.