

4. SELF-ESTEEM AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

4.1 Sources of self-esteem: While the primary source of self-esteem can only be internal, there is little question that outside sources – whether they be friends, colleagues, beliefs or social mores – also have a significant impact on our level of self-esteem. In brief, internal sources are factors that reside within the individual, whether they are ideals, beliefs, practices or behaviors.

External sources of self-esteem are factors present in the environment that impact us. Growing up in an environment conducive to a healthy sense of self-worth greatly increases the chance that a person will have an appropriate level of self-esteem.

Internal Sources of Self-Esteem

What is the contribution of the individual to his or her self-esteem and what is the contribution of other people and the environment? Self-esteem is influenced by both internal and external factors. By “internal” I mean factors that reside within (or are generated by) the individual- ideas, beliefs, practices and behaviors.

Regrettably, teachers of self-esteem are no less impervious to the worship of false idols than anyone else. I recall listening to a lecture by a man who delivered self-esteem seminars to the general public and to corporations. He announced that surrounding ourselves with people who think highly of us is one of the best ways to raise self-esteem. I thought of the nightmare of low self-esteem in people who are constantly bombarded with praise and adulation– like rock stars that have no idea how they got where they are and cannot survive a day without drugs. I thought of the futility of telling people with low self-esteem, who feel lucky if they are accepted by anyone, to raise their self-esteem by only seeking the company of admirers.

The ultimate source of self-esteem is and can only be internal. When we seek it from external sources, in the actions and responses of others, we invite tragedy.

I do not mean to suggest that a psychologically healthy person is unaffected by the feedback he or she receives from others. Certainly it is wiser to seek companions who boost our self-esteem rather than work to diminish it, but to look to others as a primary source of our self-worth is dangerous. There are immense differences between people for whom positive feedback is the only important factor and people for whom the importance is considerably less.

The environment someone grows up in can support and encourage the healthy assertion of consciousness, or it can oppose and undermine it. Many individuals suffer so much damage in their early years, before their self is fully formed, that it is all but impossible for healthy self-esteem to emerge later without intense psychotherapy.

External Sources of Self-Esteem

External sources of self-esteem are factors that are present in the environment—messages transmitted verbally or non-verbally, beliefs and ideas passed on by parents, teachers and significant others. If a child grows up in an appropriately nurturing home environment, the likelihood is increased that he or she will learn the actions that support self-esteem (although there is no guarantee). If a child is exposed to the right kind of teachers, the likelihood is increased that self-esteem-supporting behaviors will be learned.

If a person experiences successful psychotherapy, in which irrational fears are dissolved and blocks to effective functioning are removed, one consequence is that he or she will manifest more of the behaviors and actions that support self-esteem. But it is a person's actions that are decisive. While external sources can act as catalysts for a healthy sense of self-worth, internal processes are what truly determine a person's level of self-esteem.

The First Steps Toward Self-Esteem

There is great joy in self-esteem, and often joy in the process of building or strengthening it, but this should not obscure the fact that more is required than blowing oneself a kiss in the mirror (or numerous other strategies of equal profundity that have been proposed). Low self-esteem does not have to be a lifetime sentence. By integrating the six pillars of self-esteem into our lives, we can experience growth in our self-efficacy and self-respect.

The first enemy of self-esteem we may need to overcome is laziness. Sometimes we fail for no reason other our decision to not commit the requisite effort to a task. Sometimes we are lazy; we choose not to challenge inertia, or be awoken. The other dragon we may need to slay is the impulse to avoid discomfort. Living consciously may force us to confront our fears and come into contact with unresolved pain. Self-acceptance may require that we make real to ourselves thoughts, feelings or actions that disturb our equilibrium. Self-responsibility demands that we face our ultimate aloneness and relinquish our fantasy of a rescuer. Self-assertiveness entails the courage to be authentic, with no guarantee

how that will be received. Living with purpose pulls us out of passivity into the demanding life of high focus. Living with integrity requires us to choose our values and stand by them.

If the process were easy, if there was nothing hard about it at any point, if perseverance and courage were never needed— everyone would have good self-esteem.

4.2 barriers to personal development: If you seek to grow as an individual or improve an aspect of your life, you deserve to be commended. Personal growth is an endlessly rich and fascinating topic with numerous opportunities for positive change. Unfortunately, just like trying to make other types of changes, you often encounter barriers along the way. They can be internal or external, but they share one common aspect -- they can prevent you from fulfilling your potential.

Time

- Time is a crucial factor in personal growth and development, and many individuals lack enough of it. Between work responsibilities, childcare issues and just trying to survive on a day-to-day basis, you may find yourself lacking the hours necessary to devote to your own goals.

Attitude

- A negative attitude is a major factor in this area. If you start out with the belief that positive development is unlikely to occur, then no matter how hard you work on it, your belief will sabotage any efforts you may make.

Family

- Family also can be a hindrance when it comes to personal growth. Often, individuals are entrenched with ideas from their families about how much someone can develop as a person, so they don't seek to move past these set levels.

Peers

- Peers also can complicate our efforts to improve ourselves. Peers often try to sabotage our goals, either consciously or unconsciously. They degrade our efforts toward growth because those efforts remind them of the growth they could be pursuing, but have chosen to forgo.

Motivation

- Lack of motivation can be an enormous barrier to personal development. Without motivation, you have little energy to accomplish tasks leading to growth. With the

right amount of motivation, however, those tasks can seem easy, and even enjoyable, to accomplish.

Money

- Personal growth does not have to take a great deal of money to accomplish, but depending on your goals, a lack of it can stall your efforts. Materials to learn about new topics and ways of living often cost money, but they are an investment in yourself.

Failure to Plan

- Lack of proper planning and preparation can lead to haphazard attempts to fulfill goals -- a recipe for wasted energy and efforts. If you are trying to break a habit, start a new career or glean insights into your thought processes, be sure to have at least a rudimentary plan to reach these goals.

Distractions

- Distractions, whether in the form of minor demands or activities that offer immediate gratification, can be counted on to undermine your efforts toward personal growth.

Perseverance

- Finally, when trying to reach personal goals, we often forget that perseverance is key. Don't expect to achieve your dreams overnight. Overcoming obstacles consistently is the only way to become the individual you want to be.

4.3 construction of self-esteem: Self-esteem is affected by physical ill-health, negative life events such as losing your job or getting divorced, deficient or frustrating relationships, and a general sense of lack of control. This sense of lack of control is often particularly marked in people who are the victims of emotional, physical, or sexual abuse, or of discrimination on the grounds of religion, culture, race, sex, or sexual orientation.

Sometimes poor self-esteem can be deeply rooted and have its origins in traumatic childhood experiences such as prolonged separation from parent figures, neglect, or emotional, physical, or sexual abuse. If you think this is a particular problem for you, speak to a mental healthcare professional. Therapy or counselling may enable you to talk about such experiences and to try to come to terms with them. Unfortunately, therapy or counselling may be difficult to obtain, and may not be suitable for everyone.

Low self-esteem can predispose you to developing a mental disorder, and developing a mental disorder can in turn deliver a huge knock to your self-esteem. In some cases, low self-esteem is in itself a cardinal feature of mental disorder, for example, in depression or in borderline personality disorder. The relationship between low self-esteem and mental disorder is complex, and a person with a mental disorder is more likely than most to suffer from long-term low self-esteem.

People with long-term low self-esteem generally see the world as a hostile place and themselves as its victim. As a result, they feel reluctant to express and assert themselves, miss out on experiences and opportunities, and feel helpless about changing things. All this merely lowers their self-esteem even further, and they end up getting caught in a downward spiral.

Thankfully, there are a number of simple things that anyone can do to boost his or her self-esteem and, hopefully, break out of this vicious circle. You may already be doing some of these things, and you certainly don't need to do them all. Just do those that you feel most comfortable with.

1. Make three lists: one of your strengths, one of your achievements, and one of the things that you admire about yourself. Try to get a friend or relative to help you with these lists. Keep the lists in a safe place and read through them regularly.
2. Think positively about yourself. Remind yourself that, despite your problems, you are a unique, special, and valuable person, and that you deserve to feel good about yourself. Identify and challenge any negative thoughts that you may have about yourself, such as 'I am a loser', 'I never do anything right', or 'No one really likes me'.
3. Pay special attention to your personal hygiene: for example, style your hair, trim your nails, floss your teeth.
4. Dress in clothes that make you feel good about yourself.
5. Eat good food as part of a healthy, balanced diet. Make meal times a special time, even if you are eating alone. Turn off the TV or radio, set the table, and arrange your food so that it looks attractive on your plate.
6. Exercise regularly: go out for a brisk walk every day, and take more vigorous exercise (exercise that makes you break into a sweat) three times a week.

7. Ensure that you are getting enough sleep.
8. Manage your stress levels. If possible, agree with a close friend or relative that you will take turns to massage each other on a regular basis.
9. Make your living space clean, comfortable, and attractive. Display items that remind you of your achievements or of the special times and people in your life.
10. Do more of the things that you enjoy doing. Do at least one thing that you enjoy every day, and remind yourself that you deserve it.
11. Get involved in activities such as painting, music, poetry, and dance. Such artistic activities enable you to express yourself, acquire a sense of mastery, and interact positively with others. Find a class through your local adult education service or community centre.
12. Set yourself a challenge that you can realistically achieve, and then go for it! For example, take up yoga, learn to sing, or cook for a small dinner party at your apartment or house.
13. Do some of the things that you have been putting off, such as clearing out the garden, washing the windows, or filing the paperwork.
14. Do something nice for others. For example, strike up a conversation with the person at the till, visit a friend who is sick, or get involved with a local charity.
15. Get others involved: tell your friends and relatives what you are going through and enlist their advice and support. Perhaps they have similar problems too, in which case you might be able to band up and form a support group.
16. Try to spend more time with those you hold near and dear. At the same time, try to enlarge your social circle by making an effort to meet people.
17. On the other hand, avoid people, places, and institutions that treat you badly or that make you feel bad about yourself. This could mean being more assertive. If assertiveness is a problem for you, ask a healthcare professional about assertiveness training.

4.4 sense of life: The **meaning of life** is a philosophical question concerning the significance of life or existence in general. It can also be expressed in different forms, such as "Why are we here?", "What is life all about?", and "What is the

purpose of existence?" It has been the subject of much philosophical, scientific, and theological speculation throughout history. There have been a large number of proposed answers to these questions from many different cultural and ideological backgrounds.

The meaning of life is in the philosophical and religious conceptions of existence, social ties, consciousness, and happiness, and borders on many other issues, such as symbolic meaning, ontology, value, purpose, ethics, good and evil, free will, the existence of one or multiple gods, conceptions of God, the soul, and the afterlife. Scientific contributions focus primarily on describing related empirical facts about the universe, exploring the context and parameters concerning the 'how' of life. Science also studies and can provide recommendations for the pursuit of well-being and a related conception of morality. An alternative, humanistic approach poses the question "What is the meaning of *my* life?" The value of the question pertaining to the purpose of life may coincide with the achievement of ultimate reality, or a feeling of oneness, or even a feeling of sacredness

A sense of life is a pre-conceptual equivalent of metaphysics, an emotional, subconsciously integrated appraisal of man and of existence. It sets the nature of a man's emotional responses and the essence of his character.

Long before he is old enough to grasp such a concept as metaphysics, man makes choices, forms value-judgments, experiences emotions and acquires a certain implicit view of life. Every choice and value-judgment implies some estimate of himself and of the world around him—most particularly, of his capacity to deal with the world. He may draw conscious conclusions, which may be true or false; or he may remain mentally passive and merely react to events (i.e., merely feel). Whatever the case may be, his subconscious mechanism sums up his psychological activities, integrating his conclusions, reactions or evasions into an emotional sum that establishes a habitual pattern and becomes his automatic response to the world around him. What began as a series of single, discrete conclusions (or evasions) about his own particular problems, becomes a generalized feeling about existence, an implicit metaphysics with the compelling motivational power of a constant, basic emotion—an emotion which is part of all his other emotions and underlies all his experiences. This is a sense of life.