

SELF-ESTEEM AND HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

5. THE CONCEPT OF POSITIVE SELF-ESTEEM

5.1. Self-Esteem is Acquired

Self-confidence gives you the freedom to make mistakes and cope with failure without feeling that your world has come to an end or that you are a worthless person. – Anonymous

Self-confidence comes with the feeling that you are in control, that you are above the fray and that no one can hurt you physically or emotionally. It's a state of mind that some people enjoy on an almost constant basis while, for others, it may only be felt on very rare occasions. The lack of self-confidence can be debilitating to the point of ruining a person's life. In the worst-case scenarios, professional help is needed but in most cases self-improvement techniques are enough to solve the problem. The first thing that a person in search of more self-confidence should understand is that a lack of confidence is not some innate trait. We were all born with a clean slate. At birth, self-confidence was not an issue. Self-confidence is a construct that is formed through living experiences, something that starts in our earlier years and evolves one way or another ever since.

Second, lack of self-confidence is often attributed to a specific condition such as, being too short, being too tall, not being pretty enough or being from the wrong side of the track. Those have very little to do with the real reason that a person lacks confidence. Lack of self-confidence is the result of a weak ego and not the result of some physical shortcoming. People of all shapes and forms as do people of almost every conceivable condition have healthy self-esteem and a very acceptable degree of self-confidence. Next, the person who seeks to improve the self-confidence has to understand that every one of us is unique. We have our good sides and our not-so-good sides. That some people will like us and others will remain cold and that what matters most in getting others approval is the way that we feel about ourselves. If we don't like who we are and if we don't feel worthy of acceptance, why should anyone else? Others get most of their cue from us to decide on how they will feel about who we are. We are constantly sending messages through body language that reveal our most inner feelings. Those messages travel below the radar of consciousness, but they very accurately reveal

to the world how we feel about ourselves. People sense those messages and react accordingly.

All that being said, it becomes evident that the degree of self-confidence is very closely related to the degree of self-esteem or self-love. So, the quest for self-confidence should be done via an increase of self-esteem. Getting to accept and love ourselves has been called the ultimate seduction. It is so called because it is the most important of all seductions. With it comes self-confidence and everything related to that most precious possession. It does not matter from what angle we look at it seduction is seduction. Whether we want to seduce someone else or if the object of our seduction is ourselves, the process is the same. We seduce by being kind, nice, loving, supporting and above all appreciating. That's how we can seduce someone else and it's also the way that we can seduce ourselves. So, to acquire self-confidence, all that we need to do is to get to appreciate and like whom we are and the process will unfold naturally.

5.2. Self-Acceptance

Self-acceptance is embracing yourself as you are right now, regardless of your past. It has been called the 5th Component of Confidence. Self-awareness plays a big role in self-acceptance. As you develop the ability to gain knowledge about yourself you will become more and more able to accept and improve those areas where you lack confidence. Self-acceptance takes some work. You have to be able to get to a place where you know and understand who you are, and that means that you will likely have to make some changes. Self-acceptance also means that you may have to face some fears and step outside of your comfort zone. It's about being able to separate who you are from what you've done. It's about understanding that everyone makes mistakes, and that's how we learn and grow.

Accepting yourself doesn't necessarily mean liking every aspect of yourself. That will come later, with self-love. It means being willing and able to experience everything you think, feel, or do, even if you don't always like it. If you don't accept yourself, you will feel ashamed or embarrassed about who you are. At times we have a lot of pressure to be perfect, but it doesn't exist. Nobody is perfect and everyone has insecurities. We all don't like certain parts of our bodies, we all wish we could change something about ourselves, but someone who is truly and authentically confident doesn't dwell on those things. You don't have to be perfect, or anywhere close to perfect to have absolute confidence and to be happy.

If you are comparing yourself to other people, stop this. It will be a constant choke hold on your confidence. There will always be someone somewhere who is better looking, smarter and more successful. That does not mean they are any better than you. There are things that you excel at that other people wish they could do. It's true. A very important part of acceptance is to understand that you don't necessarily have to like things you accept. Acceptance is not the same as approval. If you accept it, don't think that you are approving of it. A great example of this is the fact that peer pressure is very prevalent in our society. We accept that, but it doesn't mean that we approve of it. So there can be things about yourself that you disapprove of, but can still accept, in order to achieve absolute confidence.

A lack of self-acceptance happens for a couple of reasons:

- Not being accepted or loved unconditionally as a child. People who have had to experience that pain, will go through life being internally motivated to compensate for that lack of acceptance by seeking it in their relationships with other people.
- If the most important people in your life do not accept you as you are, or they are trying to change you this will greatly impact your level of self-acceptance.

The following tips will help increase your self-acceptance:

- Remind yourself of your unique talents and abilities.
- Be aware of your image and the way you appear to people.
- Accept compliments from others and trust that they are true.
- Take complete responsibility for your life.
- Think about your future possibilities and realize that your potential is unlimited.
- Give yourself permission to be your authentic self.
- Give yourself permission to fail, because failure is a great way to learn and get closer to success.

If you are willing to experience and embrace whatever you think, feel or do, even if you don't always like it, you will begin to accept yourself and begin to change and grow into the person you want to be.

5.3. Personal Safety

Personal safety is the freedom from worry that an individual might suffer physical harm and threats of physical harm. Personal safety also includes psychological safety which is the freedom from worry about physical safety. When physical and psychological safety are compromised an individual's fundamental rights are at risk. Personal safety refers to external awareness of one's environment, how we speak to others, moral choices and how one lets other people talk to him or her. It entails the skills which are needed to set limits in situations which make one uncomfortable. Your personal safety does not have to be left up to chance. Though you cannot eliminate all possibility of becoming a victim, there are steps you can take to reduce the odds. An attacker looks for essentially three things when picking a victim: vulnerability, accessibility and availability.

Practicing the following personal safety tips as you go about your daily activities may make you less attractive to a would be criminal.

- Be alert. Know who is near you and what activities are going on around you.
- Walk with authority, look ahead and scan your surroundings.
- Do not walk in poorly lit areas.
- Be alert to someone who asks for directions and/or continues to engage you in conversation.
- Be identification conscious. Observe your attacker's personal appearance, type of weapon used, and type of vehicle so you can accurately describe them to police.
- Immediately report any incidents to the police and do not hang up until the police arrive.

5.4. Self-Esteem Balanced in Relation to Emotions

Self-esteem is related to numerous emotional states. Although they attest to the central role that self-esteem plays in emotional life, the sheer number of these linkages poses some interpretive problems. Emotional states are often highly correlated, raising the question of whether self-esteem is uniquely associated with some emotions but not others. For example, people who feel ashamed also may feel unhappy, but self-esteem may be uniquely related to the former emotion, not the latter. Evidence that this occurs is found by asking whether self-esteem predicts

unhappiness once feelings of shame are taken into account. The link between self-esteem and emotion may be more specific than this analysis implies. As first noted by researchers in the 1900s, some emotions always describe how people feel about themselves. According to James, these self-relevant emotions include feelings of pride, conceit, and arrogance (on the positive side) and modesty, shame, and mortification (on the negative side). An example may serve to clarify the distinction between self-relevant emotions and emotions that are not, by definition, self-relevant. Consider the antecedents of happiness and pride. Happiness is a diffuse emotion that does not necessarily involve the self as a reference point. One can, for example, feel happy standing in the warm sunshine or watching a toddler eat an ice cream cone. These experiences will not, however, evoke feelings of pride. This is because pride always describes how people feel about themselves, usually arising when people assume causal responsibility for bringing about a positive outcome. This does not mean that happiness never results from a self-relevant experience. After all, students are happy when they get good grades. But they feel proud only insofar as these grades are viewed as arising from a self-relevant factor. The key distinction to be made, then, is that self-relevant emotions always involve the self as a reference point but that non-self-relevant emotions (such as happiness and sadness) do not necessarily involve the self as a reference point. There is one other way of looking at these relations. A person who feels proud also is apt to feel happy, but the reverse is not necessarily true. This asymmetry clouds the interpretation of the link between self-esteem and emotional states. If one finds that self-esteem is related to both happiness and feelings of pride, then the former relation may be artifactual.

What makes a person feel good about himself? Many things, such as taking a walk in the park, going for a swim, a golf game, or just playing outside with friends or family. Playing is important for people of all ages. In fact, if more adults took time to just play with family and friends they would be surprised to learn how great they would feel. It can even help you improve your relationships with family and friends. What comes with the interaction of play is the effect it has on your emotional health, which is a significant part of living in health and wellness. And having a high self-esteem is crucial to emotional health. It facilitates personal growth. If you believe you are a worthwhile person then you will take care of your health in all ways - education, spiritual development, personal relationships, nutrition, fitness, and all of the rest. Building a healthy self-esteem can be challenging, but it is necessary for your well-being.

Self-esteem and body image are part of the same package. In developing a positive self-esteem you need a positive body image. Experts explain body image as being

a subjective experience. In other words, it is a psychological phenomenon. It is the picture of our own body which we form in our mind, and thus relates to all other images and attitudes we hold about ourselves. Body image plays a major role in your body concept. Body concept is a complex structure that not only embraces your body which is the central element, but your social roles, material possessions, and personal relationships. Whether you like it or not, you are living at a moment when society places a great value on looks. Because your appearance affects your sense of self and how people respond to you, that makes you vulnerable to beliefs and feelings that keep you imprisoned by anguishing over how you look, anxiety over whether you are doing enough to be attractive, and the feeling of shame for worrying about it. You can enhance your self-esteem in two ways. One is by fostering a positive view of your inner self. The other is by developing a healthy relationship with your outer self, your body. Building your self-esteem would improve your body image and in turn your body concept. It is important to concentrate on who you are, what you want out of life, how can you achieve your goals, and balance all of these factors, rather than focus on how you look.

Emotional well-being cannot be disconnected from physical health and wellness. Emotionally healthy people maintain strong relationships with others. Mental health means striking a balance in every aspect of your life. This means many things such as:

- Taking time to accept who you are.
- Making friends who you can count on.
- Manage your stress.
- Develop your own spirituality.
- Deal with your emotions.
- Cope with changes that affect you.
- Know your priorities.
- Receive kindness gracefully as well as give it gracefully, and
- Set time aside to be totally alone to contemplate life or just to relax.

5.5. Positive Signs of Self-Esteem

What is self-esteem? Self-esteem is how we value ourselves; it is how we perceive our value to the world and how valuable we think we are to others. Self-esteem affects our trust in others, our relationships, our work – nearly every part of our lives. Positive self-esteem gives us the strength and flexibility to take charge of our lives and grow from our mistakes without the fear of rejection. Following are

some outward signs of positive self-esteem:

- Confidence
- Self-direction
- Non-blaming behavior
- An awareness of personal strengths
- An ability to make mistakes and learn from them
- An ability to accept mistakes from others
- Optimism
- An ability to solve problems
- An independent and cooperative attitude
- Feeling comfortable with a wide range of emotions
- An ability to trust others
- A good sense of personal limitations
- Good self-care
- The ability to say no

The higher your self-esteem, the happier and more successful you will be in living your life. It is possible that by just changing a few characteristics, your self-esteem and self-confidence will begin to become more positive.