

## LOW SELF-ESTEEM

There are so many people who feel inferior, inadequate, and insecure. Many believe that they are just insignificant, and this causes a lot of mental anguish. On the other side of the fence, this feeling of unworthiness drives people to achieve at their highest and if this is not managed correctly, they become over achievers and perfectionists which has its own set of dangers, so I will leave that topic for another day.

When we do not feel good about ourselves, we start to compare ourselves to others. This is a terribly negative space to be in, why? Because we are using ourselves as the standard of measurement and we may find ourselves looking down on others or the opposite, we start looking down on ourselves.

Self – Esteem, Self – Image and Self - Concept are often words that are thrown around in society today. Self – Image and Self Concept refer to the mental pictures we have in our heads about ourselves (how we look, what our weaknesses are, what our strengths are). Self-Esteem refers to what we as individuals refer to as our **worth, competence and significance**. Once we develop low self-esteem, we start to refer to ourselves (or deliver negative messages to ourselves) as incompetent, unworthy and inferior to others.

Where does this originate from?

Sometimes the opinion of others affect how we see ourselves and sometimes it is those deep beliefs that we have about ourselves that are hard to change or even challenge; even though outside evidence (e.g. excellent achievements) shows we should not feel that way.

If we are receiving negative messages repeatedly, especially from those close to us, we certainly start to believe this to be true. We start to label ourselves: BAD, ADDICTED, WAYWARD, STUPID, PHONY, IRRESPONSIBLE, DREADFUL, WEAKER, ISENSITIVE, UNFORGIVING, UNKIND, FAILURE etc.

Low Self – Esteem will influence how we think and how we present ourselves to others. Strangely enough, we do not seem to realize that most, if not all of us struggle with low self-esteem and a negative self-image.

### What Causes Low Self-Esteem?

**False Beliefs** – we believe the wrong things about ourselves, we believe that we are worthless, we believe that because we have done some stupid, senseless, or thoughtless things in the past that we should continually have to punish ourselves.

**Guilt** – when we have violated the principals of right and wrong, we feel a lot of guilt, shame, and disappointment in ourselves. We feel disappointed in ourselves, and this brings up feelings of remorse and shame and these feelings undermine our self-esteem.

**Parent / Child Relationships** – Even the best parents in the world cannot help but make mistakes (we are all human!) We can react with criticism, we can explode in anger, we say the wrong things. It is important to realize though that children are rarely, if ever affected by such parental mistakes **BUT!!** We must remember that self-esteem is formed at an early age and more serious damage can be caused by neglect, shaming, comparisons to other siblings, ridicule, neglect, repeated punishment, name calling etc.

**Experiences of Defeat and Failure** – Society values success, it is difficult to handle ourselves and our emotions when we fail or are rejected because of it. We care too much about what people think of us.

**Unrealistic Expectations** – Some advice from me would be to never raise your level of expectation because you will be disappointed! Some things never change and when we go in with an expectation that things will be different and they are not .....well, we are disappointed.

**Faulty Thinking** – We must be incredibly careful about the thoughts that fly around in our heads, someone I know once said “the mind is a dangerous place, one should never go there” We all have thoughts in our head all the time, conversations that go on in our minds... we should be incredibly careful how we talk to ourselves because we are the ones that are listening. (e.g. “Whenever I fail at reaching a goal and expectation of myself, I must feel pressured, ashamed and a failure”)

**Community or Societal Myths** – Every society has values that are emphasized by mass media, too much pressure is put on us to be perfect, and in a world that is controlled and often dictated by social media, a person’s worth is often gaged by appearances, wealth and possessions. It is easy to fall into the trap of feeling “less than” if only perfection can be accepted.

Research has shown that people suffering from low self-esteem tend to feel isolated and unlovable, they withdraw from other people, they feel too weak to overcome their deficiencies, they are angry at themselves, they have difficulty getting along with other people, they become submissive and dependent, and they get hurt too easily. A person with low self – esteem will not expose him/herself to others, they will struggle with trust issues, they can often fail to get along with others. They will feel jealous, they will reject themselves, criticize themselves and could also suffer from depression. A person with low self-esteem cannot easily accept compliments from others, they often are unable to express love.

**HELP!!**

### **WHAT MUST ONE DO?**

Set realistic goals for yourself. Identify the things that you do not like about yourself and remove them ONE BY ONE. If we think about it, it has probably taken years to build up a negative self – image or negative self – esteem – it is not going to go away tomorrow or the next day, it is going to be a process. Accept that it is so and do what you can.

Know that you are doing the best that you can under your current circumstances. Do not put pressure on yourself to conform to what society thinks you should conform to. Take the cards that you have been dealt in your life and figure out how you want to play them.

Relax your value judgements on yourself. Get rid of the guilt you feel. Do something constructive to help you with your guilt feelings, don’t isolate, get your story out there. A problem shared is a problem halved. Seek help from a therapist that is not going to judge you.

Know yourself and your beliefs, reach a decision and stick to it. Take a good hard look at your honesty level, it does not help to be in denial, confront what you need to confront and get it over with. Seek help from a professional if you need to.

Journal – there is actual power in writing things down. When you journal; you should find that it is very hard to lie to yourself, if you have a lot of self – doubt and you second guess yourself, then writing about events prove to yourself that this is true and this really happened to you.

Try and accept yourself for who you are now. Acceptance comes first; change comes afterwards.

Stop comparing yourself to others!

Be careful about what it is that you are saying to yourself, investigate better ways of thinking. Avoid situations that you know are going to affect you negatively. Educate yourself, prevent further damage to yourself by seeking help or learning more.

Find a group that can help and support you, a group where those around you have similar worries, issues, and concerns. Group counselling is an excellent way to get the support and encouragement that you need. Provided that the group is one where you feel comfortable and at ease.

Try not to build your self – esteem around external factors like your achievements, work hard on your inner self, work hard on issues like your values and how you would like to be as a person. Do not try and impress others in order to create your self-esteem.

Take a moment to consider how you could thank God for a limitation that He has allowed in your life, whether it is physical, intellectual, an aspect of your background, or anything else. A lot of the time, those limitations are what helps us to bring positivity into the lives of others. Serve others, help others when the focus is becoming too much on yourself and your imperfections. There are many people out there that will appreciate you for who you are.

Give it a chance.

Source: Christian Counselling (third edition) by Gary R Collins PHD

And of course, myself.