

Note where your environment is providing adequately for you and where it is lacking. Doing so can give you clues on how to build your self-esteem.

3. Spend less time with critical people and more time with those who appreciate you.
4. Spend some time with yourself at the end of each day. Review what happened and how you felt during the day. Write about it in a private journal.
5. If you are feeling bad about yourself, consider finding a therapist to help you get your life on a positive track.

WHERE CAN I GO FOR MORE INFORMATION?

National Association for Self-Esteem
(www.self-esteem-nase.org).

Branden, Nathaniel. *The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem*. New York: Bantam, 1994.

Briggs, Dorothy Corkville. *Celebrate Your Self: Making Life Work for You*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977.

Burns, David D. *Ten Days to Self-Esteem*. New York: William Morrow, 1993.

Sher, Barbara, and Gottlieb, Annie. *Wishcraft*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1979.

SEE THESE HANDOUTS ON RELATED TOPICS

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Building Your Self-Esteem

WHAT IS SELF-ESTEEM?

Self-esteem literally means to esteem or respect yourself. Having high self-esteem means that you have a positive image of yourself. Let's look at where such a positive self-image comes from.

In her classic book *Celebrate Yourself*, Dorothy Corkville Briggs makes a distinction between the real you and your self-image. She says that the real you is unique and unchanging. Most of your self-image—what you think is true about yourself—is learned; it is not necessarily accurate at all!



WHERE DOES SELF-ESTEEM COME FROM?

Where are your beliefs about yourself drawn from? Where did you learn them? If you think about it, you'll see that they came from

- What others said about you
- What others told you
- What others did to you

For example, you may believe that

- You're not very smart
- You're naturally passive
- Girls aren't any good at math
- You're too old to start over
- All Breski women are doctors
- You're painfully shy
- The Hurleys never lie

In addition to learning to believe certain things during our early years, there are certain situations that make most people feel inferior or lacking in self-esteem. Some examples are

- Being criticized
- Not being loved
- Being rejected
- Experiencing failure

WHAT DOES LOW SELF-ESTEEM FEEL LIKE?

In situations that cause low self-esteem, it is not uncommon to feel

- Sadness
- Inferiority
- Anger
- Jealousy

- Rejection
- Loneliness

WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT LOW SELF-ESTEEM?

One of the most successful methods of helping people feel better about themselves is **cognitive therapy**. This therapy helps depressed and anxious people feel better by identifying how faulty ways of thinking make them feel bad. Cognitive therapists believe that faulty thoughts, or **twisted thinking**, cause us to feel bad, which makes us feel bad about ourselves.

Cognitive therapy is a process in which clients analyze their faulty thoughts and beliefs and learn to substitute them with healthier thoughts and beliefs.

Cognitive therapy is a process in which clients analyze their faulty thoughts and beliefs and learn to substitute them with healthier thoughts and beliefs. Cognitive therapists help their clients feel better in four steps:

1. Identifying the upsetting events that cause bad feelings
2. Recording clients' thoughts about the upsetting events
3. Identifying the distortions in clients' thinking processes
4. Substituting rational responses for irrational ones

Upon successful completion of these four steps, the client usually feels better about him- or herself.

Thinking the right kinds of thoughts is one way to feel good about yourself. Now, let's talk about another way to increase your self-esteem: by taking a look at your life environment and seeing whether it supports your feeling good about yourself. You may find that some nourishing elements need to be replenished. Ask yourself whether you have people in your life who:

- Treat you with love and respect?
- Encourage you to do and be anything you want?
- Help you find out what you want to do and how to do it?
- Encourage you to explore all your talents and interests?
- Are thrilled when you succeed?
- Listen to you when you need to complain?
- Help you bounce back from failure without making you feel bad?

Take a moment to think about each of the items on this list. Note where your environment is providing adequately for you and where it is lacking. Doing so can give you clues on how to build your self-esteem.

WHAT STEPS CAN I TAKE TO BUILD MY SELF-ESTEEM?

1. Pay attention to how you are feeling from moment to moment. Tune in to what your five senses are experiencing. Take it down to the most basic level of "I feel warm right now," "I feel light-headed," and "I feel a tightness in my stomach."
2. Revisit your interests and goals. Make a list of things you'd like to do and learn. Today, take one step toward learning more.