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## Friendships and Relationships

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Our self-esteem affects the type of relationships we make. If you feel low about yourself, you may go out of your way to make people like you.

You may become part of a gang just to gain a sense of belonging. Or, you may simply not make any effort to make friends because you don't feel like you are worth it. Sometimes people with low self-esteem become bullies because it is their way of exerting power over someone else, which helps them feel better about themselves, if only temporarily.

The way you feel about yourself, and the connections you make with others, influence each other. It is crucial to pay close attention to your self-esteem and the behavior connected to it, because otherwise you may easily find yourself in negative situations.

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Psychology 101 Part 2

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### Example of a Situation

Imagine Susie, who doubts herself, is asked out by Paul, an older boy at school. Her initial reaction might be something like, "He can't be serious, maybe he just wants to date me to get closer to another girl I know!".

However, he persuades her into it. Part of her is thrilled, but another part cannot stop questioning and criticizing. They go on a few dates and it becomes clear that Paul is looking to control someone.

In fact, he has a few self-esteem issues of his own, but he has something to prove. He grew up watching his father be in charge of his mother, bossing the family around and forcing subservience. Somehow he felt like this was an important part of being male. He told Susie what to do and even what to wear. Even though she didn't really like it, she still liked the idea that someone thought she was worthy enough to hang out with.

They continued to date, but became jealous of each other. Susie felt stuck. She didn't want to continue the relationship, but she didn't want to be alone either. She had come to depend on Paul for validating herself. Eventually Paul stopped contacting Susie, causing her self-esteem to plummet further. Susie determined that she would never date again, but at the same time desperately hoped that someone would want her.

## **The Influence of Low Self-Esteem on Relationships**

As you can see, low self-esteem is problematic for healthy relationships. If one of the people does not like themselves, they tend to seek approval constantly from someone else, yet they also question that approval when they get it. They can't quite believe that anyone else can like them, so are always slightly suspicious of their partner.

This can lead to conflict. We generally think that others see us as we see ourselves. While a person with high self-esteem won't question why another person likes them, a person with low-self-esteem will. It's like a natural byproduct of doubting themselves. As a result, they tend to remain guarded in relationships, or they do things that jeopardize the relationship because they don't believe it will last anyway.

## **What About Non-Romantic Relationships?**

It doesn't have to be romances that have the potential to chip away at our self-esteem. Any relationship, even with an acquaintance, may perpetuate low self-esteem. Perhaps it is tempting to forgo making any friendships at all. However, no man is an island. We are wired to be social creatures, and part of being your own best friend is having the confidence to reach out to others when we need a hand.

## **Call to Action : You and Your Influences**

Consider the people in your life. How have they impacted your self-esteem? Think carefully about them and write down the influence of:

- Your parents
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Your close family

- Your Friends
- Your Teachers
- Your Acquaintances

Do you see any patterns emerging? How might you change any negative influences to positive ones?

## Key Points:

- Self-esteem is reflected in our relationships.
- Low self-esteem can severely impair the quality of our relationships.
- Low self-esteem is not a reason to avoid forming relationships, but it asks us to reconsider our self-worth.

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