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[Home](#) > Recognizing Low Self-Esteem

Recognizing Low Self-Esteem

Kim Lyon40.2K reads

Low self-esteem may be pretty sneaky and difficult to spot sometimes. Although many people have a pre-defined idea of what low self-esteem is, it doesn't always manifest in the ways you might expect.

The person who constantly demeans and criticizes others, may have just as low of a self-esteem as the person who talks badly about themselves.

Low self-esteem is not always easy to recognize. For example, sometimes very successful people have low self-worth.

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Low Self-Esteem Has Several Faces

Three types of people with low self-esteem are rebels, victims, and imposter.

1. Rebels exhibit low self-esteem through defiance, as they attempt to assert themselves through flouting others. They are determined to show that they are somehow above or immune to the rules and punishments that everyone else lives by. Deep within they are indignant with a feeling of inadequacy.
2. Victims don't like to take responsibility for their actions or feelings. They find it easier to blame everything on an external cause and see no wrong in a pity-party. Victims are

vulnerable in relationships because they tend to let someone dominate them.

3. Imposters put a lot of energy into appearing self-confident. However, they are driven by an intense fear of failure and a constant need to prove themselves. Often imposters are very competitive and judging their achievement against others.

Consider these two vignettes:

Meet Anna and Susie. Anna wakes up every morning feeling enthusiastic. She looks forward to going to school because she enjoys her classes and believes she can do well if she tries. Anna takes good care of her appearance and takes pride in eating healthily. She is involved in lots of after school activities and has lots of friends.

Susie wakes up dreading going to school. She was bullied and lacks the confidence to stand up for herself. In a recent test she didn't do very well, and now she thinks, 'Why should I bother? I'm such a failure! There is no point in trying because I did poorly in the last one.' She finds comfort in eating sugary foods.

Feeling insecure about her appearance, she doesn't participate in any sports clubs and feels envious of girls like Anna. Susie used to feel so low about her looks that she spent a lot of time putting on make-up until she felt it looked perfect, but now she doesn't bother.

What did you think? Anna appears to have healthy self-esteem. Her outlook on life is positive. She is content in her own skin and feels confident that she can deal with most of what life throws at her. From looking after herself physically with a healthy diet and regular activity, she feels energized and happy on the inside.

Meanwhile, Susie's self-esteem seems to be lower. Her feelings of self-worth are negative. She takes failure personally and thinks that she is somehow a bad person. Although she used to be concerned about her appearance, now she doesn't see the point.

Although the cases of Anna and Susie are fictional, they illustrate some important points about self-esteem and the kind of things that influence it.

Do you recognize yourself or anyone you know in these cases?

Anybody Can Struggle with Low Self-Esteem

Low self-esteem is not exclusive to adolescent females. Anybody can have low self-esteem: men, women, children, adults, rich or poor. People of any nationality and background can face feelings of not being good enough. It's important is to honestly look at ourselves and think carefully about our self-worth.

Measuring Self-Esteem

Self-esteem exists along a continuum, ranging from very high to very low. Measuring self-esteem can be useful on a personal level because it allows us to check progress. If we actively

work on building our self-esteem, having a base measurement of our self-esteem can be useful.

Popular Tests

Many tests and scales have been devised to measure self-esteem. Some of the most widely used include the Janis-Field Feelings of Inadequacy scale (Janis & Field, 1959), the Tennessee Self-Concept scale (Fitts, 1964), Rosenberg's Self-Esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965), and the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (1967).

Although there are many tests available on the Internet, it is important to note they are not necessarily reliable.

This online questionnaire ^[1] to gauge your self-esteem is a good place to start. The test was developed by Muriel Ryden and is based on Coopersmith's self-esteem inventory.

Another, more subjective, way to assess your self-perception is to brainstorm all the words that describe yourself. Look at the list of adjectives. How many are positive and how many are negative? When people pay you compliments for your achievements or looks, do you struggle to believe them? This could also indicate low self-esteem.

Self-Esteem and Other Issues

Sometimes low self-esteem is part of another bigger issue, like depression or anxiety. If you have a consistently low mood and pessimistic view of yourself and the future, and have experienced changes in your sleeping, eating and energy levels that have lasted for a fortnight or more, please consult a doctor or a mental health professional.

Key Points

- Self-esteem manifests itself in many ways, from self-criticism to someone always criticizing others.
- Low self-esteem can affect anyone.
- There are many ways of measuring self-esteem. You can gauge your self-esteem by doing a specially designed test or a self-evaluation.
- Self-esteem is a key component of our mental health. Low self-esteem often plays a part in anxiety, depression and perfectionism.

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Links

[1] http://www.mhhe.com/socscience/hhp/fahey7e/wellness_worksheets/wellness_worksheet_024.html