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Self-Defeating Behaviors

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Your behavior can influence your self-esteem and either keep you stuck in the vicious cycle of self-doubt, or help you feel happier and more liberated.

When someone is viewing themselves in a negative light, their behavior tends to follow how they are feeling about themselves. Usually it is a self-defeating behavior which keeps the person stuck with low self-esteem.

The banner features the Explorable logo and the text "Quiz Time!" at the top. Below are three quiz cards:

- Quiz: Psychology 101 Part 2
- Quiz: Psychology 101 Part 2
- Quiz: Flags in Europe

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Common Types Of Self-Defeating Behaviors

Avoidance

Avoidance behaviors involve avoiding certain people or situations with the idea that it will also mean avoiding hurt or pain. Avoidance can also show up as delaying doing things, stopping an activity part way through, or giving something minimal effort. In the short-term, there is logic to avoiding behaviors. If you don't participate, you can't lose. However, by the same token, you can't win if you don't play.

Perfectionist

Perfectionist behavior means trying to do things perfectly, even if it isn't possible to be a 100% right, a 100% of the time. A person with low self-esteem may show some perfectionist

behavior, thinking that being perfect will make everything okay. Trying to do things perfectly can cause enormous amounts of stress and anxiety, which in the long-term isn't very good for self-esteem.

Take the example of Anna, who was very concerned about her appearance. She spent a lot of time before school doing her make-up and hair. When it came to doing sports or going to the beach with others though, she was always trying to find an excuse for fear that people would see her looking less than perfect.

Hiding

Hiding behaviors occur when a person is ashamed or embarrassed to show their real self. They might try to cover up parts of their identity, such as sexuality, personality traits, or appearance. People with low self-esteem may engage in hiding behaviors because they feel it will make them more like everyone else, and therefore able to fit in.

Passive

When people are passive, they don't stand up for their rights and believe that others are somehow more worthy than they are. Passive people are those hunched in the corner of room, arms crossed, tapping their feet. Typical passive behaviors include staying quiet even when you have something to say, steering clear of tensions, apologizing for no reason, and always agreeing even when you don't really want to.

Attention-Seeking

Sometimes people with low self-esteem are so concerned with getting the approval of others that they act in ways that may be dangerous. Other times, they are constantly seeking positive feedback from others.

Aggressive

Sometimes a person becomes aggressive as a way of shielding others from their low self-esteem. They literally become defensive and lash out at others. Aggressive behavior can include physical acts, but also includes shouting, bullying and demeaning others.

What's Wrong With These Behaviors?

All of these self-defeating behaviors can be damaging to other people as well as ourselves. Although they might feel comfortable in the short-term, they don't help us in the long run.

The first step to break out of these behavior habits is writing down which ones you recognize in yourself, along the advantages and disadvantages of each one. Try to think about the long term effects as well as the short-term.

Once you've identified them, choose one and challenge yourself to make a slight difference in your behavior. For example, if you realize you are usually passive with your friends, suggest an outing to your favorite place with them, or dare to decline if they ask you to do something you'd rather not.

Key Points

- When our self-esteem is low, it is common to engage in a number of self-defeating behaviors.
- Self-defeating behaviors may seem beneficial in the short-term, but in the long term they have adverse effects on our well-being and self-esteem.
- An important step in changing behaviors is recognizing their advantages and disadvantages.

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