



What Is Self-Esteem?

You may well have heard the phrase self-esteem before without really thinking about its meaning. Before you can do anything about your own self-esteem, or that of others, you need to understand the concept and its basics.

People with high self-esteem appear to be friends with themselves. They accept themselves for who they are and look out for and after themselves. Perhaps you know someone who doesn't look after their own wellbeing, who may even proclaim to hate what they see in the mirror. These are the people who lack self-esteem.

Psychologists have suggested several definitions for self-esteem:

“Self-esteem is a realistic, appreciative opinion of oneself. “Realistic” means accurate and honest. Appreciative implies positive feelings and liking.” (Glenn Schiraldi, p.20, *The Self Esteem Workbook*)

“The beliefs and evaluations people hold about themselves determine who they are, what they can do and what they can become.” (David Burns)

“A personal judgment of worthiness that is expressed in the attitudes we hold about ourselves.” (Stanley Coopersmith)

- What do you notice about these definitions?
- Do they differ from your previous ideas about self-esteem?
- In your own words, what does self-esteem mean to you?
- Is your self-esteem something that is stable, or does it fluctuate, depending on your mood, or what is going on in your life?

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What Is Healthy Self-Esteem?

Healthy self-esteem is when a person values themselves. It is the idea that we are inherently worthy, the understanding that humans are fallible. Someone with healthy self-esteem can appreciate that they make mistakes from time to time but this does not make them a bad or useless person.

A person with healthy self-esteem is their own best friend. They treat themselves with self-respect and positive regard. When talking to themselves, they do not put themselves down.

Self-esteem is important because it affects every area of our lives. It is a filter through which we experience and react to everything that happens to us.

Why Is Self-Esteem Important?

People with low self-esteem have been shown to have an increased risk of mental illnesses such as depression or anxiety. In fact, there are a wide range of problems which can start when a person doesn't value themselves. These include: abuse, poor body image, disordered eating habits, unhealthy relationship patterns, impaired communication skills, negative thinking, and underachievement at work or school.

Consider self-esteem to be like the roots of a tree. When life challenges us, a healthy sense of self allows us to stand firm and resilient. If our self-esteem is low, we may find ourselves flustered and shaken.

What Is the Difference Between Self-Confidence and Self-Esteem?

Self-confidence refers to the judgment we have in our abilities. It is possible to be confident in some areas of our lives but not in others. For example, you may think that you are good at math, but lousy at spelling. Overall you may still have low self-esteem, even though you are confident in some abilities.

It is natural to experience times when our confidence fluctuates. Self-esteem tends to be more of a constant, because it is how we see ourselves as a whole, not just one or two ability. In some respects, self-confidence is easier to build than self-esteem, because we can practice and train ourselves in that area.

There is often an inter-play between self-confidence and self-esteem. Often a person with low self-esteem does have low self-confidence, but it is possible to have good self-confidence with low self-esteem.

Key Points

- There are several definitions of self-esteem. At its core, having self-esteem is about having a stable positive regard for ourselves.
- Low self-esteem has been linked to a range of negative feelings and can predispose someone to certain mental illness, such as depression and anxiety.
- Self-confidence is about how we value our abilities, while self-esteem is how we value ourselves.

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