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## Where Is Self-Esteem Born?

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Self-esteem is influenced by many factors. Our core beliefs, the things we believe to be true about ourselves, determine self-esteem to a large extent.

A person who tells themselves that they are fundamentally ugly, worthless or stupid is showing that they have negative core beliefs. An important thing about these thoughts is that they aren't necessarily true. Rather, they are opinions, not fact.

Our core beliefs are deeply held assumptions, we hold about ourselves. Often they are so deeply embedded in our thinking that we don't recognize them as beliefs that may not actually be true.

The banner features the Explorable logo at the top center. Below it, three quiz cards are displayed in a row. The first card shows a pair of red roller skates on a wooden deck, with the text 'Quiz: Psychology 101 Part 2'. The second card shows a fan of colorful pens, also with the text 'Quiz: Psychology 101 Part 2'. The third card shows a Ferris wheel at sunset, with the text 'Quiz: Flags in Europe'. To the right of the cards is a link that says 'See all quizzes =>'.

## Examples of Core Beliefs

Childhood experiences, school, family and friends, as well as the media, contribute to our core beliefs. Here are some core beliefs that have been associated with low self-esteem, excerpted from Bourne, 1992 (Rational Responses to Four of Ellis' Irrational Beliefs):

1. I must be loved or approved by everyone I consider significant.
2. I must be great at everything I do. I should not be satisfied with myself unless I am living up to this standard.

## Can You See Them Differently?

It is easier to avoid than face life's difficulties and responsibilities. These core beliefs can keep us stuck in a rut. For each of them, consider an alternative which is kinder to a person's self-worth. One way to gain perspective on core beliefs is to imagine a friend saying these things about themselves. What would you say to them to counter these statements?

## Core Belief and Your Childhood

Often core beliefs become part of our thinking when we are young. Many aspects of childhood shape our self-esteem, from our family to our school environment. From our teachers to our friends, to the rules and style of discipline, schooling can greatly affect the way we evaluate ourselves.

A school which praises academic achievement with little regard to sports may have a devastating effect on a person whose talents lie in athletics. If teachers punish and shame students time and again, the pupil may grow up with the core belief that they are somehow lazy, bad or stupid.

## Self-Esteem and Aggression

Abuse or neglect can have devastating consequences for a person's sense of self. A person who is neglected may receive the implicit message that they are not worthy. Abuse in its various forms can have effects long after the time after the act, whether it was physical, sexual, or emotional.

If you have suffered any kind of abuse, it is highly advisable to seek help. Sometimes we are affected by abuse in ways we don't always recognize, and talking to a mental health professional can set us free from the past.

## Call to Action - Identify the Sources

Write down some positive and negative things you think are true about yourself. Then, try to think where these beliefs came from. For example:

Susie thinks, "I'm fat and ugly." When she sat and reflected on why she thought this way, she realized it was because bullies had called her names for a long time and she had eventually come to internalize what they said.

There could be many sources of your inner critic. Perhaps it was your mother making comments about your size. Maybe it was your father always demanding the highest scores from school. It could have been friends who put you down a lot. Now is the time to assess the impact they had on your life, and start to let it go.

Identifying the sources of our low self-esteem can help us to understand ourselves, and ultimately improve it.

## Key Points:

- Self-esteem has a variety of sources
- The foundation of our self-esteem begins in infancy and largely built in our childhood
- Our core beliefs are key in creating and sustaining self-esteem

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