

# Self-Esteem & How It Develops

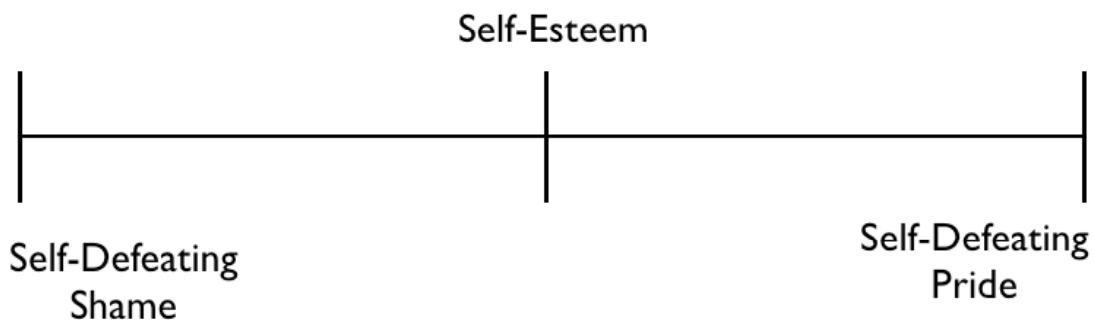
If a person does not have parents that have bolstered his/her self-esteem, how does one build self-esteem?

## **Self-Esteem:**

In principle self-esteem is generally stable, but can fluctuate from day to day according to thought patterns which can be influenced by physical health, chemistry, appearance and relationships. The fact that self-esteem can fluctuate is a reason for optimism, because it suggests that it can change.

Self-Esteem is a realistic, appreciative opinion of one's self. **Realistic** means accurate and honest. **Appreciative** implies positive feelings and liking. Some speak of high and low self-esteem, but this makes self-esteem seem like a numbers game that is competitive and comparative. It's preferable to say simply that people possess self-esteem when they have a realistic and appreciative opinion of themselves.

Self-Esteem is squarely between **self-defeating shame** and **self-defeating pride**.



People with **self-defeating pride** are trying to be more than human. They are arrogant and narcissistic, which means that they think they are better and more important than others as a person. Their view of others is vertical, or comparative, which is to say that to be on top means others must be below them. **Self-defeating pride** is often rooted in insecurity.

People with **self-defeating shame**, or **self-defeating humility**, believe that they are less than human. They view people vertically and see themselves as the dust of the earth. They hold an unrealistic and unappreciative opinion of themselves.

By contrast to the above views, **people with self-esteem** believe they are neither more or less than human. Knowing their faults and rough edges, they still are deeply and quietly glad to be who they are.

## Concepts Related to Self-Esteem

### **Identity:**

Answers the question: “Who am I?” What defines me and my essential character?  
Defined by who we are on the inside.

### **Appreciate:**

To estimate the quality or worth of something.

**Accept:** Believing in one’s self and receiving one’s self with pleasure. I acknowledge my faults, I love myself, though not necessarily all of my behaviors. As I improve my behavior, then I can feel good about me and my behavior.

**Self-Confidence:** Beliefs in one’s ability. An “I can do it” attitude.

**Pride:** Healthy pride is a realistic sense of one’s own dignity or worth, or self-respect, gratitude and delight in one’s achievements, talents, service or membership in a family or race, etc.

## Cost / Benefits Analysis

Some people do not build self-esteem because they do not know how. But others resist building self-esteem because there are apparent advantages to self-dislike.

### **Advantages of Self-dislike:**

- No risk. I have no expectations of myself, nor do others. I can be lazy and set low goals. I’ll rarely disappoint myself or others.
- The world is predictable. I understand when people don’t accept me because I don’t accept myself. I understand not having to try.
- Sometimes I get pity and attention.
- Self-dislike is a family norm. When I follow the pattern, I feel like I fit in.
- Self-dislike keeps me from developing self-defeating pride.
- It justifies my poor dressing and grooming habits.

### **Dis-advantages of Self-dislike:**

- Painful.
- No fun.
- Leads to psychosomatic symptoms and disease.
- Creates a vicious cycle:
  - I have a low opinion of myself and I do not try.
  - Others treat me poorly.
  - They interpret my pessimism and apathy as indicators of incompetence.
  - Their poor treatment of me confirms my low opinion of myself.

### **Benefits of Emotional Change:**

What would be the positive consequences of my having a realistic and appreciative opinion of myself?

- Less susceptible to persuasion.
- Less driven by fear.
- More motivated by enjoyment.
- Happier.
- Try/Risk more.
- More at ease with my rough edges.
- Happier with my relationships.
- More comfortable expressing my feelings.
- Less selfish and protecting.
- Less questioning of myself.
- Worry less.
- More likely to be respected and treated well.
- Considered more attractive.
- Make better objective decisions.
- Feel liked for who I am.

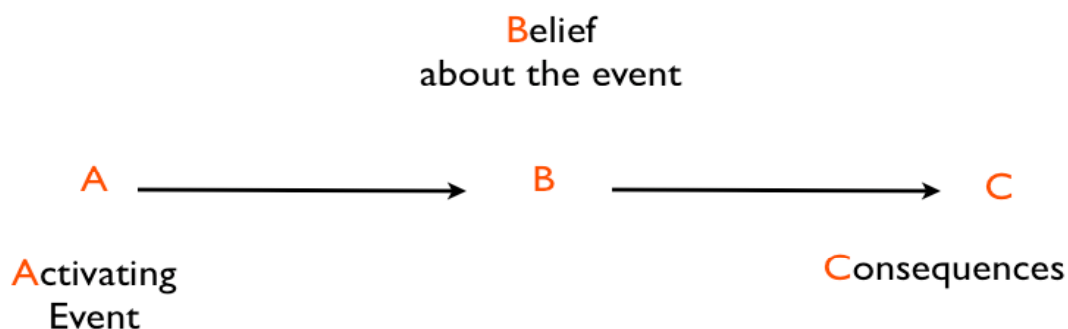
## **Recognize and Replace Self-Defeating Thoughts**

Although all humans are infinitely worthwhile, all do not necessarily have a sense of their own worth. One reason is that negative, depressing thought patterns can erode one's sense of self worth. **Note:** Not saying that worth is eroded, only one's ability to experience it.

### **Consider this situation:**

The boss scowls as he passes John and Bill in the hall. John begins to feel down on himself as he thinks, "Oh no! He's upset with me." Bill only gets **concerned**, not **disturbed**, as he tells himself, "The boss is probably having another battle with the front office."

What is the difference in the two? Not the event, but the way John and Bill thought about the event.



## **Automatic Thoughts and Distortions**

Whenever an upsetting event occurs, automatic thoughts (AT's) run through our minds. Although we're each capable of thinking reasonably about upsetting events, sometimes our automatic thoughts are distorted—or unreasonably negative. Distorted AT's profoundly affect our moods and our sense of worth. You need to learn to catch common distortions, challenge their logic and replace them with thoughts that are more closely aligned with reality instead of thoughts that depress.

### **Rejecting the Positive:** (Learn to accept compliments and do not downplay them)

Negating the positive so that our self-esteem stays low or discounting accomplishments or compliments. “Oh, it was really nothing, anyone could have done that.”

### **All or Nothing Thinking:**

Hold yourself to an impossible standard of perfection or something close to it. When you fall short, you feel like a failure. For example, “If I am not the best, then I am a failure.” “If I'm not performing perfectly than I am a failure.” “If I score below 90 points I am a failure.” A poor performance never makes a complex person worthless, just fallible.

### **Assuming:**

Assume the worst without testing the evidence. Assuming self-talk would be when you tell yourself “I know I won't enjoy myself,” or “I know that I will do a lousy job even though I am prepared.”

### **Catastrophizing:**

Make our problems so big that we feel as if we cannot solve them, so we don't. We automatically seem to exaggerate the negative and continue to reduce the positive. For example, “If she were to leave me, I couldn't stand it. It is also like making a mountain out of a mole hill. We make the problem much bigger in our head and it continues to help us dream up more potential problems that will most likely never happen.

### **Ask the following questions:**

What are the odds of this happening?

If it does happen, how likely is it to do me in?

If the worst happens, what will I do?

### **Dwelling on the Negative:**

WE must learn to focus on the problem rather than the solution. (FOTSRTOTP)

“How can I feel better about the day when I was criticized?” “How can I enjoy my life when my children have problems?” It is a kind of thinking that allows us to live in the “FUNK”.

### **Feelings Facts:**

Making feelings facts is taking one's feelings as proof of the way things really are because we assume that what we “feel” is what the other person really meant. When in reality, things were quite different because of perspective was flawed because we made an assessment based from our feelings and not the facts.

For example:

“I feel like such a loser. I must be hopeless.”      “I feel ashamed and bad. I must be bad.”  
“I feel inadequate. I must be inadequate.”      “I feel worthless. I must be worthless.”

**Unfavorable Comparisons:**

When we compare ourselves to others we see ourselves as less favorable.

For example, “I’m only a housewife and mother.” “Jan’s a rich, bright lawyer.” But you’re an excellent homemaker. Jan is an alcoholic. Yes, but. . . . It is like having a magnifying glass that magnifies your strengths and faults and shrinks others’ faults and then you end up feeling inferior. As a result, when we compare ourselves to others we ourselves as less favorable or attractive.

**Over-generalizing:**

Deciding that negative experiences describe your life completely. It is where we tend to decide that negative experiences describe our life completely.

“I *always* ruin everything.”

“I *always* get rejected in love.”

These global statements are unkind and inaccurate.

**Labeling:**

Give yourself a label or name that causes emotional harm.

“I am a loser, stupid, dumb, boring, fat, ugly, etc.”.

**Shoulds (Musts/Oughts):**

Demands we make on ourselves.

I “*should*” be a perfect lover. - I “*must*” not make mistakes. - I “*should*” be happy and never depressed.

We think that we motivate ourselves with these statements, however, they usually just make us feel worse. The only “*should*” we should have is that we are fallible. “*Shoulds*” must be replaced with “*coulds*” and “*woulds*” or “*want to’s*.”

**Fairy-Tale Fantasy:**

Demand the ideal from life. Bad things do happen to good people. We say things like “that should not happen to me”, “That’s not fair”. We expect the world to be different and it does not match our wishes or experience so we get down or depressed.

**Personalizing:**

Seeing yourself more involved in negative events than you really are. A student drops out of college and his mother says its all my fault. We must learn to distinguish *influence* from *causes*. Sometimes we can influence others’ decisions, but the final decision is theirs. We tend to blame ourselves for other people’s choices thereby taking on too much responsibility for their decisions. We think to ourselves, “If I just would have done this or that they would have made a better choice.

**Blaming:**

The opposite of personalizing. Whereas personalizing puts all the responsibility on yourself for your difficulties, blaming puts it all the responsibility on something else for your lack of follow-through.

For example:

“He makes me so mad.”

“She has ruined my life and my self-esteem.”

“I am a loser because of my crummy childhood.”

“I get poor grades in school because my parents got divorced.”

**R U Cold and Suffering from Fear and Poor Behavior?**

- R Rejecting the Positive
- U Unfavorable Comparisons
- C Catastrophizing
- O Overgeneralizing
- L Labeling
- D Dwelling on the Negative
- A Assuming
- S Should's
- F Fairy Tale Fantasy
- F Feelings Facts
- A All or Nothing
- P Personalizing
- B Blaming