

Boost your Self-Esteem

■ by Veronica Grijalva, MA, Staff Therapist

Self-esteem is defined as our sense of personal worth and ability that is fundamental to our identity. This involves how much we feel valued and loved by others as well as how much we accept ourselves. **Self-image** is a term to describe our mental picture of ourselves. A lot of our self-image comes from our life experiences and interactions with other people. This contributes to overall self-esteem.



A healthy, or high self-esteem leads to appreciating our worth and taking pride in our abilities. An unhealthy, or low self-esteem can lead to feelings of worthlessness and a lack of confidence. A low self-esteem usually develops in childhood. Causes of low self-esteem can result from abuse, excessive criticism, negligence, unrealistic expectations of oneself, bullying, and other negative experiences. For example, excessive criticism by a parent or authority figure may become the norm for a child. Thus that child grows to develop a negative inner voice. That inner voice begins finding fault automatically and even unconsciously. High self-esteem can be promoted by a loving environment which includes encouragement and support.

Everyone can experience fluctuations with self-esteem at certain points in life. Some short term factors can diminish one's self-esteem such as unemployment or the loss of a romantic partner. In turn, a person with low self-esteem can learn ways to build up to a healthy self-esteem. A healthy self-esteem is important for success in school, careers, friendships, and romantic relationships.

Ways to boost self-esteem:

- Self care: Eating well, sleeping enough, and exercising are all givens for feeling healthy. This helps your mental image stay positive.
- Pamper or reward yourself once in a while
- Replace negative self-talk with affirmations. Positive affirmations are positive statements you can tell yourself to remind yourself of your strengths, abilities, and achievements.
- Come up with your own list of achievements. They can be major or minor. Did you pass an exam recently? Join a fitness club? Even daily "successes" can be listed: making dinner, making someone laugh, paying a bill, etc.
- Shift focus from the things you do not like about yourself to your positive qualities. Keep those readily available as nice reminders of your worth.
- Examine your personal appearance. Your dress and hygiene can affect the way you carry yourself. Even colors you wear can have an influence on the way you feel. Are your clothes clean and neat? Do you wear only dark shades? Try changing it up to a bright shirt or accessory. Practicing good posture makes you feel (and look) confident.
- Help someone out. Volunteer at a local charity or offer a friend a helping hand. The feeling of making a difference and that your help is valued will feel great.



Veronica Grijalva sees clients in our New Lenox & Orland Park locations.

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800.361.6880 | info@chicagochristiancounseling.org

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