



Self Esteem for Young People

What Is Self-Esteem?

Self-esteem is how you feel about yourself.

People with positive self-esteem:

- feel liked and accepted
- are proud of what they do
- believe in themselves

People with **low** self-esteem:

- feel bad about themselves
- are hard on themselves
- think they are not good enough

Where Does Self-Esteem Come From?

Parents, teachers, and others. The people in our lives can affect how we feel about ourselves. When they focus on what's good about us, we feel good about ourselves. When they are patient when we make mistakes, we learn to accept ourselves. When we have friends and get along, we feel liked.

But if adults scold more than they praise, it's hard to feel good about yourself. Bullying and mean teasing by siblings or peers can hurt self-esteem, too. Harsh words can stick, and become part of how you think about yourself. Luckily, it doesn't have to stay that way.



The voice in your own head. The things you **say** to yourself play a big part in how you feel about yourself. Thinking, "I'm such a loser" or "I'll never make friends," hurts your self-esteem.

There are other ways to think about the same things. "I didn't win this time — but maybe next time." "Maybe I can make some friends." That voice is more hopeful. It helps you feel OK. And it could turn out to be true.

Sometimes, the voice in our head is based on harsh words others have said. Or on bad times we have faced. Sometimes, the voice is just us being hard on ourselves. But we can change the voice in our own head. We can learn to think better of ourselves.

Learning to do things. We feel good when we learn to read, add, draw, or build. Play a sport, play music, write an essay, ride a bike. Set the table, wash the car. Help a friend, walk the dog. Each thing you learn and do is a chance to feel good about yourself. Step back and look what you can do. Let yourself feel happy with it.

But sometimes we're too hard on ourselves. We don't accept that what we do is good enough. If we think, "It's not really any good," "It's not perfect," or "I can't do it well enough," we miss the chance to build self-esteem.

What If My Self-Esteem Is Low?

You can do things to feel better about yourself. It's never too late. Here are some tips to raise your self-esteem:

Be with people who treat you well. Some people act in ways that tear you down. Others lift you up by what they say and do. Learn to tell the difference. Choose friends who help you feel OK about yourself. Find people you can be yourself with. Be that type of friend for others.

Say helpful things to yourself. Tune in to the voice in your head. Is it too critical? Are you too hard on yourself? For a few days, write down some of the things you say to yourself. Look over your list. Are these things you'd say to a good friend? If not, rewrite them in a way that's true, fair, and kind. Read your new phrases often. Do it until it's more of a habit to think that way.



Accept what's not perfect. It's always good to do the best you can. But when you think you need to be perfect, you can't feel good about anything less. Accept your best. Let yourself feel good about that. Ask for help if you can't get past a need to be perfect.

Set goals and work toward them. If you want to feel good about yourself, do things that are good for you. Maybe you want to eat a healthier diet, get fitter, or study more. Make a goal. Then make a plan for how to do it. Stick with your plan. Track your progress. Be proud of what you've done so far. Say to yourself, "I've been following my plan to work out every day for 20 minutes. I feel good about it. I know I can keep it up."

Focus on what goes well. Are you so used to talking about problems that they're all you see? It's easy to get caught up in what's wrong. But unless you balance it with what's good, it just makes you feel bad. Next time, catch yourself when you complain about yourself or your day. Find something that went well instead.

Give and help. Giving is one of the best ways to build self-esteem. Tutor a classmate, help clean up your neighborhood, walk for a good cause. Help out at home or at school. Make it a habit to be kind and fair. Do things that make you proud of the kind of person you are. When you do things that make a difference (even a small one) your self-esteem will grow.