

12 Steps to Building Self-Esteem

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“When the melancholic dejectedly desires to be rid of life, of himself, is this not because he will not learn earnestly and rigorously to love himself? When a man surrenders himself to despair because the world or some person has left him faithlessly betrayed, what then is his fault except that he does not love himself the right way.” Soren Kierkegaard in *Works of Love*.

I like to help people establish healthy relationships. I have been doing this a long time and every year that passes I learn something new. For men and women in recovery from addiction or past trauma, healthy relationships don't come naturally. You have to learn how to make love work for you. In this article I want to offer you information about building self-esteem. Once you learn to love yourself, your whole attitude about love shifts. You just naturally gravitate toward people who will reciprocate the love you offer them.

1. Adopt an attitude of self-acceptance or self-love. This means really understanding that you are a worthy person despite your shortcomings. This is a mindset. Once you have a general acceptance of your worth as a human being, spend some time focusing on your specific attributes. This enhances your self-worth. Just don't get carried away.
2. As part of your new positive thinking campaign, learn how to superimpose new information over your old negative tapes. (Negative tapes are all the hurtful and inappropriate things people said about you while you were growing up.) This is the best way to diminish inappropriate self-criticism which erodes self-esteem.
3. Reclaim your self-respect—the pride or satisfaction that comes from: self-discipline and being responsible.
4. Surround yourself, whenever possible, with people who affirm you (people who like you just the way you are). Like it or not, your relationship with others can erode your self-esteem. So make a point of choosing your friends carefully. You did not have a choice about this as a child, but as an adult you are free to choose your own companions.
5. Get to know yourself—who you are, your values, needs, wants, taste, etc. How can you value what you do not know.
6. Stop trying to be perfect. No one is perfect. We all live in the shadow of perfection and are perfectly imperfect.
7. Do nice things for yourself. Take care of yourself. This self-care validates your self-worth. At the same time, do nice things for other people. There should be some balance in your life between taking care of yourself and being kind to others.

8. Stop comparing yourself to others. You are special in your own way and this is the attitude you must have about yourself.
9. Learn how to receive, especially if you are a people pleaser or have always had a monopoly on giving. Stop dismissing compliments and returning gifts. Let the love come in.
10. Be creative. Everyone has a talent and they should use it. This stimulates self-satisfaction and reinforces the positive things you have been thinking about yourself.
11. Stand up for yourself, especially if you don't usually do this. Remember that you value what you take care of.
12. To protect your newfound self-esteem, prepare yourself mentally for those times when people try to drag you down (people you can't avoid like co-workers or family). Learn how to keep from taking them so seriously, as well as how to filter out inappropriate criticism.

If you work very hard on this task of building up your self-esteem, you will have taken a great step forward. Your life will change and you will be genuinely happy—perhaps for the first time in your life. And it gets better. There is no end to the happiness you will know when you love yourself.

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