

## IMPROVING YOUR SELF-ESTEEM



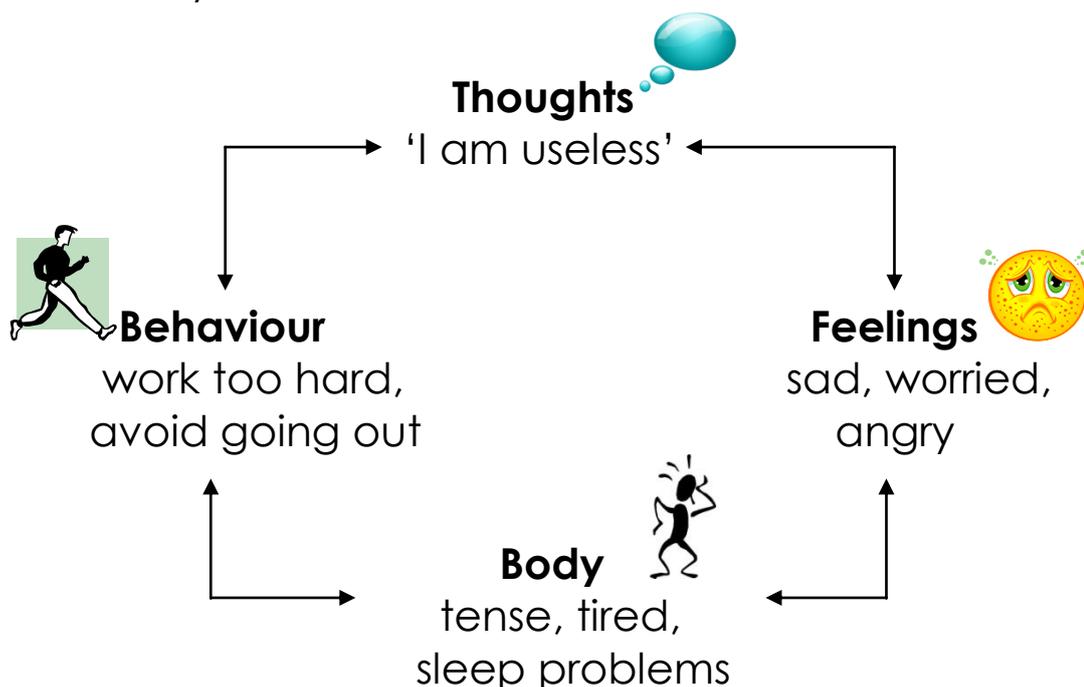
## What is self-esteem?

Self-esteem is how we see ourselves and value ourselves as people. Most people's ideas about themselves come from their life experiences and from messages they have received from others about the kind of person they are. If these are mostly negative, people can often develop negative beliefs about themselves. These negative beliefs can lead to low self-esteem.

## How low self-esteem can affect you

Low self-esteem can affect your:

- **thoughts**, for example, blaming yourself, being hard on yourself
- **feelings**, for example, sadness, worry, anger
- **body**, for example, sleep problems, feeling tired, tense muscles
- **behaviour**, for example, avoiding going out, trying to please everyone



It can have an impact on many areas of life:

- relationships with others
- self-care
- work or school
- leisure or recreational activities

It may also be a consequence of other problems:

- stress
- relationship problems
- panic
- pain or illness

## **How to break the vicious cycle**

### **Challenging your thoughts**

Some beliefs that maintain low self-esteem:

- a human being must be perfect
- people should always help each other
- others are always right
- I'm not good enough or skilled enough or wise enough, etc
- men should never cry
- if I don't do extremely well, I'm no good at all
- if I make a mistake I'll never forgive myself
- when they see how bad I am they will reject me
- never burden other people with your problems
- you can't help yourself, it's the way you are

Sometimes if you hold to these beliefs you can have negative thoughts about yourself. In order to challenge negative thoughts you must learn to question them. Don't just accept them as fact. Try recording your thoughts.

Some of the following questions could help you to find an alternative point of view:

- what is the evidence to support this thought?
- what is the evidence against this thought?
- what would someone close to me say?
- what is the worst that could happen?
- what is the best that could happen?
- what is realistically most likely to happen?
- how else can I view this situation?

It is also important to learn to accept and value your **good qualities**. When we have low self-esteem we tend to focus on negative aspects of ourselves and things that happen. Ignoring the positives will keep your low self-esteem going. It will stop you having a balanced view which takes account of your strengths **and** weaknesses.

You can start with creating a 'positives' notebook.

- think of all your positive qualities and write them down. Note your skills, talents, achievements and experiences, no matter how small. These could be, for example: funny, good cook, friendly, helpful. If you find this difficult ask a friend to help you.
- keep a daily record of any situation that shows off your good qualities:

Example: Monday

Helpful - took Grandma shopping

- read your notebook at the end of each day to review what you have recorded.

Your aim is to become aware of the positive things that you do without needing to record them.



## **Relaxation & Reward**

When we are stressed, our muscles tense up and our body system speeds up. Relaxation helps us to **slow** down.

If we can learn to turn on the bodily feelings of relaxation we can turn off the symptoms of tension. You can't experience relaxation and tension at the same time. Slowing down can be done in a number of ways:

- everyday relaxation (try to set aside at least 30 minutes per day) – for example listening to music, having a bath, going for a walk
- exercising – helps reduce the stress hormones that build up in the body. This in turn helps to reduce tension and you feel better
- relaxation exercises – see booklet 'A guide to relaxation'

When things go right or you have tried something new, **reward** yourself. You could watch TV, read your favourite book or have a relaxing bath. Remember how important it is to look after yourself. Be sure to get enough sleep, eat well, plan fun activities and make time for things you enjoy.



## **Overcoming avoidance**

You may feel it's easier in the short term to avoid doing things or seeing people. But in the long term it's better not to. If you avoid things you will never know whether you could have: coped, done them well, or even enjoyed them.

Avoidance may feel like a solution because it makes you feel better. But it can be unproductive for the following reasons:

- it can make the problem worse
- it creates new problems
- it interferes with your life

For these reasons it is better to **face** difficulties rather than avoid them. Try breaking difficult tasks or situations into small steps, for example:

Task: do a presentation at work (seems overwhelming)

Step 1: write notes about what you would like to say

Step 2: draw up presentation slides

Step 3: practise making a presentation to one person

Step 4: practise making a presentation to friends/family

Step 5: carry out a presentation at work

This leaflet may not help everyone with low self-esteem. You may find that your beliefs about yourself are so strong that you cannot begin to use the skills detailed here. If this is the case, you may be suffering from depression.

Symptoms of depression can include:

- feeling sad, low in mood or empty most of the day, nearly every day
- little interest or pleasure in things you previously liked to do
- appetite is much greater or much less than usual and you have lost or gained weight
- having trouble sleeping or sleeping too much
- so agitated, restless or slowed down that others have begun to notice
- feeling tired and lacking energy
- feeling worthless or excessively guilty about things you have done or not done
- difficulty in concentrating and making decisions
- a desire to harm yourself or feeling that you might be better off dead

If you have had 5 or more of these symptoms for 2 weeks or more, you should contact your GP for further help.

## **The following organisations and helplines may also be useful:**

**CRUSE Bereavement Care** – for bereaved people and those caring for bereaved people.

(Mon-Thurs: 10am-8pm, Fri: 10am-4pm)

Tel: 0845 600 2227

E-mail support [support@crusescotland.org.uk](mailto:support@crusescotland.org.uk)

[www.crusescotland.org.uk](http://www.crusescotland.org.uk)

This website lists a large number of books and leaflets that might be helpful.

**Relationships Scotland** – counselling, mediation and family support across Scotland (Mon–Fri: 9.30am-4.30pm)

Tel: 0345 119 2020

Relationship Scotland Borders

(Mon-Fri: 9am-3pm)

Tel: 01721 724170

**Samaritans** – confidential support for anyone in a crisis

National Helpline (24 hours a day)

Tel: 116 123

Borders

Tel: 01750 20000 (local rate)

E-mail Helpline

[jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org) (answer within 24 hours)

Local Branch

21 West Port, Selkirk, TD7 4DG

## Websites

[www.bluepages.anu.edu.au](http://www.bluepages.anu.edu.au)

A good site for someone who already knows quite a bit about depression and is interested in finding out more about the way professionals diagnose and treat the condition. (Australian)

[www.lltff.com](http://www.lltff.com)

A general self-help site offering advice on a wide range of issues. It helps you to understand your behaviour and thoughts and offers help on healthy living, better sleep and relaxation.

## Books

Fennell, Melanie (2016) *Overcoming Low Self Esteem: A self-help guide using cognitive behavioural techniques, Second Edition* Robinson Publishing ISBN: 978-1472119292

Lindenfield, Gael (2014) *Self Esteem* Harper ISBN: 978-0007557462

Butler, G, Grey, N, and Hope, T (2018) *Manage Your Mind, Third Edition* Oxford ISBN: 978-0198747277

An excellent self-help textbook with chapters on all major problem areas and a good Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and problem solving approach. (Section 6 (25) is particularly relevant)

Gilbert, Paul *Overcoming Depression* (2009) Robinson Publishing ISBN: 978-1849010665 (every chapter lists key points at the end, step-by-step process makes it easy to follow).

## **Apps for mobile phone and tablets**

A range of self-help apps are available for your mobile phone and tablet. Some of these apps are free of charge, whilst others have a cost attached depending on the developer. Please use the link below to view some suggested self-help apps for different mental health problems:

<https://www.nhs.uk/apps-library/category/mental-health/>

# Notes

## **Booklets/leaflets available on the following:**

Agoraphobia  
Anger  
Anxiety  
Bereavement  
Depression  
Hyperventilation  
Loss  
OCD  
Panic (short version and long version)  
Phobia  
How to solve problems: a simple DIY technique  
Relaxation  
Self-Harm  
Self-Help websites  
Sleep  
Stress  
Trauma  
Worry

Copies of any of the above booklets are available to download/print at:

[nhsborders.scot.nhs.uk/wellbeing](https://nhsborders.scot.nhs.uk/wellbeing)

L Stewart & R Donald, 2011  
NHS Borders

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