

Improving Your Self-Esteem

By Danielle Asquith

Your future is affected by your level of self-esteem. Some adolescents take a positive path. They get along with their parents, they are successful in school, they handle responsibility very well, and they are having fun in positive ways in their adolescence. Some adolescents start to take a negative path. This can include getting involved with drugs and alcohol, having low academic achievement, and facing depression which can lead to suicide. The issue is that low self-esteem can lead to other major problems. Whichever path an adolescent takes is dependent to some extent on their level of self-esteem.



*Why are major transitions linked to low self-esteem?

Major transitions are linked to low self-esteem according to an expert, John W. Santrock, "researchers have found that self-esteem often decreases when children make the transition from elementary school to middle or junior high school"(174). Santrock also mentions that self-esteem can be affected while transitioning into high school or even college. Any major change seems to influence a person's feelings of self worth. One possible explanation is that adolescents feel good about themselves while being at the "top" of the school, for example being a 6th grader or senior in high school. Then they go from what they perceive as being on the "top" to going back to the "bottom" again, such as starting as a freshman in high school or college. It is as if they have to start all over again.

There are some researchers who believe self-esteem in adolescence isn't as bad as it is made out to be. Other researchers have linked low self esteem with teen pregnancy, high dropout rates, teen violence, and other adolescent problems. The organization, National Association for Self-Esteem supports the facts that low self-esteem is where trouble begins. Their website is devoted to the links between self-esteem and other adolescent problems. You can visit their website for more information: <http://www.self-esteem-nase.org/>



*How widespread is the issue?

The low self-esteem issue is widespread. Santrock shares Harter's U.S. samples in his book, *Adolescence*. The samples show the difference between the U.S. and other countries (which include: England, Ireland, Australia, Canada, Germany, Italy, Greece, the Netherlands and Japan) when it comes to what areas contribute to low self-esteem. The correlations that are explained in each area: physical appearance, scholastic competence, social acceptance, behavioral conduct, and athletic competence, are the average correlations computed across a number of studies (175).

*What contributes to us having low self-esteem?

- **Physical Appearance**

It is the highest area for both U.S. and other countries. The U.S. had a high of .65 out of 1.00 and other countries had .62 out of 1.00 for physical appearance affecting their self-esteem. Santrock notes that, "The correlations between physical appearance and global self-esteem (.65 and .62) are moderately high" (175).

- **Scholastic Competence**

The second highest area for the U.S. is scholastic competence. The U.S. had a high of .48 out of 1.00 and other countries had .41 out of 1.00. In 1995 another study by Paul C. Vitz, a Professor of Psychology at New York University, brought up research done on mathematical competence in 1989. In this study, eight different countries were all tested on the mathematical abilities. While the United States scored the lowest out of those eight countries, the Americans ranked highest in self-judged mathematical ability.

- **Social Acceptance**

The third highest area for the U.S. is social acceptance. The U.S. had a high of .46 out of 1.00 and other countries had .40 out of 1.00. An important factor that contributes to low self-esteem within many adolescents is the judgment of their peers. It is surprising that "general peer group (classmates, peers in organizations) is more strongly related to self-worth than is support from close friends" (Santrock 176). It is more important for them to be accepted by acquaintances than their close friends because they already feel accepted by their close friends. It becomes more important in adolescence to be well liked by everyone and all kinds of different cliques. Teenagers want to have friends and that makes a big impact on how they feel about themselves. It is surprising to many that "parental approval continues to be related to adolescents' self-worth through adolescence and this correlation does not decline until emerging adulthood" (Santrock 176).

- Behavioral conduct

The fourth highest area for the U.S. is behavioral conduct. The U.S. and other countries had .45 out of 1.00.

- Athletic Competence

The last highest area for the U.S. is athletic competence. The U.S. had a high of .33 out of 1.00 and other countries had .30 out of 1.00.

*What gender has lower self-esteem?

Girls are more likely to have lower self-esteem than boys. Santrock believes "one explanation for the decline in the self-esteem among females during early adolescence focuses on girls' more negative body image during pubertal change compared with boys. Another explanation involves the greater interest young adolescent girls take in social relationships and society's failure to reward that interest" (175). Boys with low self-esteem are more affected by family. Jelani Mandara, Ph.D. and Carolyn B. Murray, PhD wrote an article in *Self Help Magazine*, "Income was related to perceptions of the quality of family functioning for boys, but not girls". Their article also mentioned that "researchers found that African American adolescent boys with nonmarried parents are more at risk for developing low self-esteem compared with other African American adolescents".

*How do I know if I have low self-esteem?

What are the symptoms?

- tired
- prefers being alone to meeting new people or being with others
- avoids looking into the eyes of others
- has difficulty with genuine trust, intimacy, and affection

The National Association of Self-Esteem also notes that there are signs that a person has low self-esteem, but it isn't always easy to detect:

- talking to oneself negatively
- not telling the truth
- not forgiving oneself or others

"Adolescents' facial expressions and the extent to which they congratulate or condemn themselves are also good indicators of how they view themselves. For example, adolescents who rarely smile or rarely act happy are revealing something about their self-esteem" (Santrock 173). All these signs are good examples of what to pay attention to while questioning someone's self-esteem.



*How do I improve my self-esteem?

- Contribute to others (join Big Brothers and Big Sisters, help out at a homeless shelter, or shelter for abused women and children)
- Achieve (by getting involved with a sport or club, or academically)
- When you have a problem, confront it - avoiding it can be a factor of low self-esteem
- Find a support system: a parent, a counselor, a teacher, or another significant adult
- Think about what you're good at and what you enjoy, and build on those abilities
- Exercise
- Don't be critical of yourself, if you catch yourself being critical, find something positive about yourself
- Set goals

*Take a Survey

Thank you to National Association for Self-esteem, whom gave me permission to post their survey:

1. When you make a mistake do you tend to...?

- a. Feel ashamed and embarrassed.
- b. Who me? I never make mistakes.

It is quite "normal," and human, to not enjoy making mistakes! That is why we often feel embarrassed, deny their existence, and/or blame others for our errors. NASE believes that the best way is to admit your

<p>But if I did make one, I would immediately correct it and hope no one was watching.</p> <p>c. I have no fear owning up to it in public, and I am open to receiving help from others in fixing it.</p>	<p>mistakes, learn from them and take corrective action. After all, a mistake is a mistake - no more, no less.</p> <p>Best answer: C</p>
<p>2. On average, when you look at yourself in the mirror what do you believe you see?</p> <p>a. Someone who is attractive and confident.</p> <p>b. Someone who is average and often unsure about what to do in life.</p> <p>c. Someone who is ugly and insecure.</p>	<p>We live in a society that emphasizes glamour and sex appeal. That is why most of us strive to achieve external beauty, but oftentimes we lose our uniqueness in the process. If we can accept the things we'd like to change without badmouthing or beating up on ourselves, we've come a long way toward self-acceptance.</p> <p>Best answer: A</p>
<p>3. When you are dealing with a problem in your life what do you tend to do?</p> <p>a. Blame everyone or anything that I think caused the situation. It's rarely my fault.</p> <p>b. I complain and vent to anyone willing to listen but rarely address my personal responsibility for the issue.</p> <p>c. Take responsibility for my thoughts, words, and actions because if I take ownership I am not a victim to the</p>	<p>Taking responsibility for your own thoughts, words, and actions is more easily said than done. However, NASE believes the quality of your wellbeing is directly proportional to how much self-responsibility you are willing to take. When we blame others or outside events for our position or condition in life we lock ourselves into a prison of pain. There truly is freedom in taking ownership for how we respond to what happens to us in life.</p> <p>Best answer: C</p>

<p>situation.</p>	
<p>4. If my wants and needs are different from those of others I am likely to...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Give up and give in. I'd accommodate. b. Say, "My way or the highway!" I argue until I get my way. c. Try to avoid them altogether. Why bother trying to get my needs on the table. Mine aren't important, and neither is theirs. d. Create a win/win. 	<p>Your wants, needs and self-worth are as important as those of anyone else. However, that doesn't mean others will automatically respect them. If you silence your own voice, others will not know what you want or need. It's up to you to claim your needs as important and learn how to respectfully assert yourself. With practice, you'll be amazed at how this will become second nature. Best answer: D</p>
<p>5. When you think about the greater purpose of your life what do you tend to think?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. I feel like I am drifting. I am ashamed to admit it but I don't know what I should be doing or even where to start. b. I have a general picture of what I want to do and what I am capable of creating for my life. c. I am on course with my purpose, and know I am capable of creating whatever my heart desires for my life. 	<p>Have you ever wondered "Why am I here?" or "What am I supposed to do in life?" If so, you're in very good company. This is one of the most fundamental life decisions you can make. Your purpose is about what you plan to achieve and the kind of person you want to be. Your character and your habits will lead you to be healthier, happier and more successful. What are you good at? What do you really enjoy? These are two good places to look when you're trying to decide your direction. Your life has the potential to be so much more than you might imagine. The most important thing is that your life has meaning for you. Best answer: C</p>

<p>6. When I make a commitment to myself I often tend to...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Break it before the end of the hour, I am terrible at following up on my self-goals. b. I do it with hesitation and fear because I so desperately hate disappointment. c. Stick to it with conviction and await the rewards that I believe will come from it. 	<p>If you've ever heard the phrase, your word is your bond, you'll understand why honoring commitments is an aspect of healthy self-esteem. A commitment is a pledge; and a pledge is a guarantee. When you make a commitment to yourself or others you're putting your integrity on the line. As you learn to demonstrate that you can be counted on to do what you say, you build your self-esteem and your credibility at the same time. That way you and others will know that "you walk your talk." Best answer: C</p>
<p>7. When you talk to yourself (you know, that little voice in your head) what does it tend to sound like?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Very critical and negative. I often put myself down and beat myself up emotionally. b. Fairly confident and supportive, but I still have those days when my self-talk holds back my true greatness. c. Extremely confident and helpful. I have learned to become my own best friend and weed out my limiting thoughts from the empowering ones. 	<p>If you're like most people you say things to yourself you wouldn't tolerate coming from another person. Negative self-talk scares us out of taking positive risks so we can avoid failure. Here's how you can start to build positive, self-empowering inner dialogues. First, recognize your negative self-talk. Next, interrupt the pattern; tell yourself "Erase that. Here's what I really mean!" The last step is to give yourself a positive instruction, like "I can do this. I'm up to the task," or "Let's try it on for size." The more you're able to replace your negative self-talk with positive, the more your self-esteem and self-confidence will grow. Best answer: C</p>
<p>8. How do you often react to what</p>	<p>When you put more weight on your</p>

other people say about you?

- a. I take things personally, and if I think someone is saying something negative about me I take it too much to heart.
- b. I get defensive and often respond with an equal, if not greater, negative reaction to them.
- c. I value what others have to say about me -- but honestly -- I know who I am, and other peoples' opinions have no bearing on my self-worth.

own judgment than on others' it's easier to keep their words in perspective without becoming defensive. Your strong sense of self-worth allows you to maintain your power and still hear what others have to say without feeling bad about yourself.

Best Answer: C

9. How easy is it for you to make eye contact?

- a. Extremely easy and effortless.
- b. Awkward and uncomfortable.
- c. Extremely difficult and painful.

When you meet people it's a good idea to think about how you make eye contact. It's one of the first things people use to form an impression of you. There are many myths and interpretations about what direct eye contact, or a lack of it means. The point here is that when you're interacting with others, they want to know the two of you have some connection. Direct eye contact is a great way to create a climate of harmony in any relationship and demonstrate your self-worth at the same time.

Best answer: A

Thank you to National Association for Self-esteem again!

Check out their website:

<http://www.self-esteem-nase.org/>

For some tests go to:

<http://www.queendom.com/tests/index.html>

For more information on self-esteem go to:

<http://www.more-selfesteem.com/>

http://kidshealth.org/kid/feeling/emotion/self_esteem.html

