

# Counselling for self-esteem

Self-esteem is how you think and feel about yourself; this may be positive, negative or move between the two points. This usually dictates how you live your life and the decisions you make – and how you view others too.

The more positive feelings you have about yourself, the higher your self-esteem is; the more negative feelings you have the lower your self-esteem is. Our materialist world, where people continually compare themselves with those around them, highlights our insecurities and often



leads us to feel negative about ourselves and the way we live. We lose sight of the value of our own individuality and then feel inadequate and unsatisfied. It can become an enduring personality trait.

Working to improve your self-esteem takes time and effort. It requires courage and honesty to confront the things in yourself you don't like but long-term it is a worthwhile task which should help you to feel better

## Symptoms of low self-esteem

- feeling worthless
- feeling incompetent and unrealistic about our abilities
- feeling unloved
- being overwhelmed with fear and negative thoughts
- being unrealistic about goals
- being drawn into destructive relationships
- fear of change
- distorted views of self and others.

## What causes low self-esteem?

Our esteem develops from our experiences and relationships from birth. Negative experiences and troubled relationships lower it, and good experiences and strong bonds raise it. No single event or person determines your level of self-esteem, it develops over time and can change with time and events.

**The foundations are laid in childhood.** The feeling that we are valued and understood, and that our worries can be soothed, gives us an internal picture of our own worth and the feeling that

the world is a safe enough place. This in turn gives us a default position which allows us to be realistic about what we can manage, without damaging ourselves. We can recognise stress and destructive relationships as being uncomfortable and seek to put things right. We can learn to trust our instincts and that they will help us protect ourselves. Early nurturing teaches us to nurture ourselves and develop a resilience to deal with life's knocks and blows and protect ourselves from encountering too many.

Healthy self-esteem allows people to be realistic about goals, accept criticism, learn from mistakes and be adventurous but not reckless. Low self-esteem makes people fearful and unrealistic about goals and risks, which further dents their self-image. They also compare themselves unfavourably with others and have little natural ability to protect themselves.

Negative experiences and troubled relationships can lower self-esteem but it is constantly changing. Some people may be less resilient to recover from set-backs and may need to find an external source of strength to help them change. Counselling, a self-help group or religious group might be useful to help them establish a secure base from which to explore.

### **How could counselling help?**

Change might mean taking a hard look at oneself and feeling strong enough to change the things that we don't like. A supportive Counsellor can be a great help on this journey. It may be useful to make your choice of Counsellor carefully and embrace it as part of the process. Will this person help you to explore your individuality in the way you would like? Read about their details and experience and ask to speak to them before booking an appointment. Have some questions prepared to help you. Choosing your counsellor will be an important first step for you. Will it be possible to trust this person and feel safe with them? This might be more important than the type of counselling they offer.

Find someone you feel comfortable with, someone who can help you settle into a better way of feeling about yourself. When you value your own uniqueness and start to feel good about some aspects of yourself you can allow yourself to be more realistic about your goals.