

The American Counseling Association's "Counseling Corner" Weekly Columns

Taking Steps To Improve Self-Esteem

from the American Counseling Association

Self-esteem is simply your evaluation of your own worth. Feeling good about yourself is vital to living a happy, healthy life.

When someone has low self-esteem, seeing little of value in themselves, it can lead to depression, cause someone to fall short of their true potential, and cause the person to tolerate abusive situations and relationships.

Most people need to build their self-esteem. It helps us to feel confident and self-assured, and helps us to relax with others and be more comfortable with who we are and how we interact with others.

The problem often is that we aren't good at evaluating at self-worth, and we will use certain behaviors that tend to reinforce feelings of low self-esteem.

One such behavior is "waiting for the perfect moment." Rather than living in the present, we feel we have to wait until we are smarter, richer, happier or a whole bunch of "anything-er" before we take action. But if we go ahead and do things, instead of waiting for the elusive perfect moment, we usually find that we start feeling smarter, richer and happier after all.

Another contributor to low self-esteem is when we ignore our own needs. While pleasing someone else can make us feel good, that isn't true if helping others always means we are putting our own needs on hold. Sometimes it's important to recognize and voice our wants and to ask for help in small ways. Self-esteem increases when our relationships become more reciprocal.

We also hold ourselves back from higher levels of self-esteem when we try to hard to make everything perfect. While it's nice to get it all right, it's also okay to make mistakes. Self-esteem rises when we are able to view life as a work-in-progress that allows us to live and play in the moment.

Another step toward better self-esteem is simply to take chances. When we stay safe all the time inside our comfort zone we end up not progressing. Trying something new can make us feel uncomfortable, but it also can bring a sense of accomplishment when we succeeds. And even with a failure, we can feel good about being brave enough to take a new step.

Trying something, anything, is almost always better than staying stuck. The more things you try and the more chances you take, the more opportunities you give yourself to feel proud and to improve your self-esteem.

"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcorner@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org.

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