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Enhancing self-esteem

Self-esteem is an essential component of wellness. It contributes to our health, our ability to cope, and our sense of relating to the world. It is strongly associated with feelings of happiness and the ability to live a fulfilling and productive life. People with a low level of self-esteem are more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety, chronic pain, anger issues, and health problems.

But what exactly is self-esteem? In his book, *10 Simple Solutions for Building Self Esteem*, Glenn Schiraldi defines it as "a realistic, appreciative opinion of oneself."

This means you are aware of both your strengths and weaknesses, and appreciate your capabilities and frailties. You have an overall good feeling about who you are right now, yet you are humble with the acknowledgement that life is a journey and that there is a lot to learn along the way.

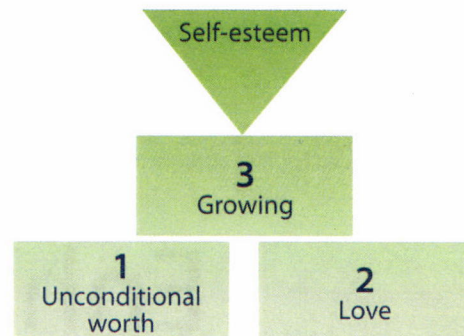
So where does self-esteem come from? Schiraldi's figure on the following page depicts the building blocks of self-esteem: unconditional worth, love, and growing.

tools for success

- Define self-esteem and identify the factors that influence it.
- Identify and adopt two key behaviors that can boost self-esteem.
- Set realistic weight loss and activity goals.
- Develop realistic expectations regarding how much weight loss can change your life.
- Learn thinking skills to develop a positive mental dialogue.

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The Foundations of Self-esteem



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Unconditional worth may be explained in this way: all people have the same basic worth inherent to being a human being. It cannot be increased or decreased by external factors, although this goes counter to what we are led to believe by the media, marketplace, and our culture. Outside circumstances may affect the way we see our worth or cloud the way others view us. Traumas such as physical, emotional or sexual abuse may lead us to believe we are “worth less.” However, no external event can change your true self worth, only your perception of it.

This is also true when it comes to characteristics such as one’s physical appearance, athletic ability, economic status, age, gender, I.Q., job title, etc. It might be helpful to think of babies or young children—they have not had time to accomplish much, except perhaps to make you laugh and smile. So how then can they be so important and precious just as they are? It is their very sense of being and delight in their world which reflects their true self worth.

And what about **love**? Although love does not create worth (since it already exists), it does help us experience and appreciate our worth. Those with a strong sense of self have usually had people in their lives that loved them “through thick and thin” and encouraged them in challenging situations. These feelings of love give us confidence and plant the seeds for growth. Even if you have not experienced this in your life, you can choose to love yourself and learn to listen for the ways in which you may sabotage your efforts to learn and grow.

Schiraldi explains the third building block of **growing** as “a direction and a process, not reaching a final destination.” We grow as we develop our character and personality. Growing allows us to develop our innate abilities and appreciate our talents. Although growth does not change our core worth, it does help us experience our life with greater satisfaction.

The Self-esteem Checkup

How do you rate your self-esteem level? Please rate yourself from 0-10 on how fully you believe each of the following statements. A '0' means you do not believe it and a '10' means you believe it's completely true. Relax and be as honest as possible. It doesn't matter how your score compares to others. You will notice you already possess areas of high self-esteem as well as areas to build on.

| | Statement | Rating |
|-------------|--|--------|
| 1. | I am a worthwhile person. | |
| 2. | I am as valuable a person as anyone else. | |
| 3. | I have the qualities I need to live well. | |
| 4. | When I look into my eyes in the mirror I have a pleasant feeling. | |
| 5. | I don't feel like an overall failure. | |
| 6. | I can laugh at myself. | |
| 7. | I am happy to be me. | |
| 8. | I like myself even when others reject me. | |
| 9. | I love and support myself regardless of what happens. | |
| 10. | I am generally satisfied with the way I am developing as a person. | |
| 11. | I respect myself. | |
| 12. | I'd rather be me than someone else. | |
| Total Score | | |

How often do you feel restricted in your daily activities because of difficulties with self-esteem? (Circle one.)

| | | | | |
|----------|----------|-----------|----------|----------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Always | Often | Sometimes | Rarely | Never |

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As you progress through the OPTIFAST Program, consider re-taking the check-up above as a way to measure changes in your self-esteem.

Positive Self-talk

You talk to yourself constantly, whether you know it or not. It may not be out loud or even consciously, but self-talk plays an important role in determining how you act and how you feel about yourself.

Consider what is likely to happen if you say, "I've had a bad day, but it won't solve anything if I eat cake. It won't make me feel any better. I'm going to go for a 10-minute walk instead." Or, "I haven't lost a pound this week, but I'm happy with the progress I've made in the past. I really don't want to eat something that will get me off track of my plan." This kind of self-talk is likely to prevent you from inappropriate eating and feeling bad about yourself. Here are some suggestions to help you make your self-talk more positive.

Develop an awareness of your negative, self-defeating thoughts.

Overgeneralizations

These are statements that exaggerate a situation such as "I didn't get invited to that party because no one likes me."

You may tell yourself that, if only you were like John or Carol, life would be great and you'd have everything you wanted.

Labeling/mislabeling

This is giving yourself labels such as "I'm clumsy" or "I'm a loser."

Catastrophic thinking

We all have difficult times we face in life, but some people turn even small challenges into disasters. "Why does everything bad always happen to me?" is a common question for people who see the world through this lens.

All or nothing thinking

This involves holding yourself to an extremely high standard and, when you cannot meet that standard, you make the conclusion that you are a failure.

Personalizing

This is when you see yourself as more involved in negative events than you really are. A good example is a person who tells herself it's "all her fault" that her husband had an affair or that her child dropped out of college.

Disqualifying the positive

When you dwell on the negative, it can be difficult to see the positive side of life.

When someone compliments you on a job well done, you minimize and underrate your accomplishments.

"Should" statements

These are demands we make on ourselves, some of which may be unreasonable or unrealistic and set us up for failure. "Why am I so bad at math? I should be better at it... my siblings are all good at math... why can't I get it?" We oversimplify our abilities and ignore the other qualities we excel at.

The perfect life fantasy

It can be easy to assume someone else's life is perfect and to wish you had their life.

Analyze and challenge your thoughts and beliefs.

Ask yourself if your thoughts are true and accurate. Are you thinking rationally or irrationally? If you are offered a piece of cake, are you really hungry? If you're not really hungry, is something else bothering you?

The following is a list of beliefs that may have caused you difficulty in your weight management efforts. Check those that apply to you and add any other beliefs that challenge you. Then fill in a positive thought that you can substitute for the negative belief.

| Negative Belief | Positive Belief |
|---|-----------------|
| 1. I'm too large to be active. | |
| 2. I deserve to eat after a stressful day. | |
| 3. Exercise is only for athletes. | |
| 4. I might as well eat it all. | |
| 5. I can't control my overeating. | |
| 6. If I eat, I'll feel better. | |
| 7. Food is my only pleasure in life. | |
| 8. People don't like me because I'm overweight. | |
| 9. I'll never have a boyfriend/girlfriend because I'm overweight. | |
| 10. I deserve to eat since I've been so good. | |
| 11. I'll never be able to eat ice cream again. | |
| 12. If I don't lose all this weight, I won't go to the reunion. | |
| 13. I can't wear stylish clothes at this weight. | |
| 14. (Insert one of your own.) | |

Use positive affirmations regularly.

One way to re-program our negative self-talk is to use positive affirmations. What we often say to ourselves can become our reality. The idea is to use positive statements of what we'd like to see happen in our lives and repeat them often enough so that, instead of the negative thoughts, these thoughts become our self-fulfilling prophecies! The next time you catch yourself thinking negatively, replace those negative thoughts with realistic, positive ones.

How do you go about creating positive affirmations?

- Personalize your statements by using the word "I."
"I stuck with my food activity plan today."
- Use the present tense rather than the future tense.
"I am making this choice to lose weight to be healthier."
- Keep your statements positive.
"I feel peaceful."
- Keep them short and sweet so you can more easily remember them.
"I love my smile."

Below is a list of positive affirmations you may want to use to enhance your self-esteem.

I am strong.

I am happy exactly as I am today.

My life is perfectly balanced.

I am beautiful.

I am great at problem-solving challenges.

I am making healthy choices for a healthier me.

I have many options in my life.

I am wise.

Today I choose to be joyful (peaceful, happy, content, etc.).

I can handle whatever comes my way.

I feel peaceful and content.

I am loved.

I am a competent, creative person.

I love my smile (eyes, hair, legs, etc).

I am doing my best.

It feels good to move my body.

I choose healthy relationships.

Build up your body image.

If you find that you have many negative thoughts about your appearance and your body, you may need to work to change your body image and develop a more positive attitude about the way you look at your present weight. A poor body image may be affecting your weight management efforts. Realizing that you have inherent self worth right now, just as you are, may enable you to care enough to take steps to improve your weight and health. For more information on body image, review the OPTIFAST LES module *Body Image*.

Remember: feelings do not determine worth. Your feelings only determine your degree of comfort or discomfort (cheerfulness vs. sadness) at a given point in time, and you can learn to modify your feelings. Likewise, thoughts and behaviors do not determine your worth. You are not what you do or what you think.

Recognizing your physical attributes can help you build a more realistic body image. Look in the mirror and write down a list of things you like about yourself, both inside and out.

| | |
|-----|----------------------|
| 1. | (Ex. My green thumb) |
| 2. | (Ex. Lustrous eyes) |
| 3. | |
| 4. | |
| 5. | |
| 6. | |
| 7. | |
| 8. | |
| 9. | |
| 10. | |

Overcome perfectionism.

If you are a perfectionist, you may be setting yourself up for failure and disappointment.

Perfectionism is difficult and can be habit-forming. You can choose to change your perfectionist behaviors. You don't have to stop doing your best or working hard. You don't have to refuse to see or act upon your mistakes. You don't have to give up overly ambitious goals.

Break the connection between perfection and satisfaction.

Record the amount of satisfaction you get from a wide variety of activities using a scale of 0 to 10. Then estimate how perfectly you did each activity between 0 and 10. You'll learn that you don't have to perform perfectly to receive a great deal of satisfaction, and that performing exceptionally well won't necessarily make you happy.

Study your environment to see if a model of perfection ever really fits reality.

Look around you to see how things could be improved. You will always find some way in which something could be improved.

Attempt to uncover the fear that drives you to perfectionism.

Record your first automatic thought that is associated with the fear of not being perfect. Ask yourself, "If this were true, why would it be a problem for me?" This will generate the thought behind your fear. When you have uncovered your fear, deal with it by asking yourself, "What is the worst thing that could happen?"

Set strict time limits on your activities.

If you are a perfectionist, you may be a procrastinator because you insist on doing things so thoroughly. Try this strategy for one week: Schedule your day and allow a specific amount

of time for each activity you plan. Quit at the set time, whether you have finished or not, and go to the next activity or project. Remember, there is a point of diminishing returns. You will enhance your satisfaction and productivity substantially.

Allow yourself to make mistakes and to learn from them.

People who are afraid of making mistakes or can't stand to be wrong are afraid to take risks. They give up the capacity for growth. Write yourself a

note or memo reminding yourself that the world won't come to an end if you make a mistake. List the potential benefits of making mistakes. Read your memo every morning for two weeks.

Count the things you do right.

In your perfectionism, you may have the bad habit of highlighting things you haven't done and ignoring those you have accomplished. Focus more on the positives in your life and you'll feel better about yourself.

The OPTIFAST Program will help you acquire skills to attack negative events, thoughts, and feelings in a systematic way. Many of the skill-building tools will require that you write down your thoughts and feelings on paper. These techniques may seem simplistic or tedious, but practice them as part of building self-esteem and a healthier lifestyle. Your efforts and willingness to use the tools will pay benefits.

Allow for time each day to systematically work on enhancing your self-esteem by using the tools provided in this module. Continue to practice this every day and notice the healthy changes in your self-image.

key goals

Using the tips in this module, develop 2 – 3 goals to work towards.

| | |
|---|--|
| 1 | |
| 2 | |
| 3 | |

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