

Information Sheet

Low Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is the way we view and think about ourselves. It is a personal measure of value and confidence in one's skills, abilities and character. Low self-esteem is a thinking difficulty that can interfere with many aspects of an individual's life through feelings of failure, worthlessness and incompetency. Such beliefs of inadequacy directly impact areas of life such as personal relationships and study or career opportunities, and often feed unhealthy behaviours. Sometimes individuals have low self-esteem in some areas of their life and healthy self-esteem in others.

Low self-esteem often develops due to life experiences during childhood such as neglect, abuse, parental absence, or a lack of warmth and inclusion. In adulthood, experiences such as a trauma, an abusive relationship, illness, work-place stress and bullying may influence a person's self-esteem. However, low self-esteem can also result from being unable to meet unrealistically high expectations of oneself or others.

Signs of low self-esteem:

- Feeling worthless and inadequate
- Feeling stressed, anxious and depressed
- Being oversensitive and shy
- Consistent negative comparison to others
- Low motivation and low resilience
- Repeatedly making poor decisions
- Fear of leaving comfort zones
- Avoidance and disbelief of compliments/praise
- Little confidence in self and abilities

Low self-esteem is thought to be maintained by *Negative Core Beliefs* (NCBs) which are long lasting, hard-to-change conclusions that we formulate based on past negative experiences. Examples of negative core beliefs are "I'm not good enough" or "I'm stupid". While NCBs may make sense at the time of a specific experience, they often persist into the future and become unhelpful. NCBs tend to be activated when an

individual encounters a stressful situation related to the area of life in which their self-esteem is low. NCBs produce two types of negative talk: *Negative Self-Evaluations* (critical and unfavourable judgments of actions and self) and *Biased Expectations* (predictions of future behaviours or experiences in a negative light, such as believing an event will go badly). By adjusting their NCBs an individual can modify what they expect of themselves, and how they judge their value. NCBs produce two types of negative talk: *Negative Self-Evaluations* (critical and unfavourable judgments of actions and self) and *Biased Expectations* (predictions of future behaviours or experiences in a negative light, such as believing an event will go badly). By adjusting their NCBs an individual can modify what they expect of themselves, and how they judge their value.

Techniques to help with low self esteem

- Practise positive self talk
- Celebrate small achievements
- Keep a thought diary to monitor self talk
- List your strengths and positives
- Challenge negative self-talk by looking for evidence that discredits it
- Remember that nobody is perfect and that we all make mistakes
- Try to do more things that you enjoy
- Talk about how you are feeling with a close friend or family member or a professional
- Exercise, as it can help improve your mood

Keep in mind that everyone can lack self-esteem and will throughout life have negative thoughts about themselves. However, when an individual continuously thinks of themselves in a negative light, help is needed. Adjusting this outlook and perspective of self will result in higher life satisfaction and healthier wellbeing.