



Embrace
Your
Greatness

50 WAYS to BUILD
UNSHAKABLE SELF-ESTEEM

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Embrace Your Self~Worth

OVERCOMING LOW
SELF-ESTEEM

Low self-esteem is one of the most common issues that underlie the majority of emotional and mental health problems, and it is one of the most common reasons why people seek therapy. It is a foundation from which many mental health disorders arise, including anxiety, depression, addictions, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, and relationship problems. Low self-esteem has robbed countless individuals of feeling true joy, negatively affecting virtually all aspects of life. Low self-esteem can rob us of our confidence in ourselves and our ability to feel good about who we are. It not only permeates our feelings about ourselves, but it handicaps our ability to relate to the world around us and it negatively impacts our relationships, work, attitudes, choices, physical health, and even life span.

You can think of low self-esteem as the common cold of emotional disturbance. Low self-esteem and self-dislike lie at the source of most mental health disorders. Cognitive behavioral therapy founder Aaron Beck (1972) found a strong link between self-criticism and depression, with up to 80 percent of depressed individuals reporting low self-evaluation. He cited a solid correlation between the sense of “self-deficiency” and the degree of depression. Low self-esteem is also strongly correlated with anxiety, eating disorders, ADHD, addictions, and other various difficulties.

Despite the far reach of low self-esteem in our lives, unlike depression and anxiety and other common mental health problems, there is no pill to treat it and it is not an official mental health diagnosis. The degree of self-esteem we have is dependent on a combination of our genetic predisposition and our

environment. Maybe your parents, albeit unintentionally, communicated that your bad behavior meant that you were a bad person. Maybe you had trouble being accepted by peers and might even have been bullied or rejected. Maybe you were the victim of emotional, verbal, physical, or sexual abuse. Maybe you simply never received unconditional support and validation because the people around you, even if they meant well, were not healthy enough to give it to you. Or maybe you were just hard-wired to be exquisitely sensitive and anxious, leading you to feeling out of sync with the rest of the world and causing you to doubt yourself and your worth.

Improving self-esteem requires the delicate balance of acknowledging the pain of the past while refusing to give the past more power than the present. The focus shifts from reliving and revisiting the past to learning, healing, and growing from it. Acknowledging past hurts rather than suppressing them is crucial to being free from them, whereas reliving them gets us stuck there. It's a tough balancing act to open your wounds in order to heal, much like a cut needs to be cleaned and treated, without picking too much at the scab and making things worse.

Learning new skills and altering perceptions help us get past the past. The important thing to keep reminding yourself is that self-esteem is alterable and is something you can change *now*. Whether it is shaky or unshakable depends on how much you choose to love yourself instead of judge yourself. Low self-esteem does not need to be a life sentence. Regardless of our genetic wiring, our interpretations that we choose to make about ourselves now will determine how the rest of our lives go. We

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potentially can have much more power over our thoughts than we realize. It comes down to learning to take charge of your life, reframing your perceptions, and developing new techniques to claim the self-love that you deserve.

It might take some work to embrace your greatness, but aren't you worth it?

1: Take Stock of Your Self-Esteem

“A man cannot be comfortable without his own approval.”

—Mark Twain

When I think of self-love, I think of Whitney Houston’s 1986 hit song “The Greatest Love of All,” which regards the most important love of all to be our own self-love. It seems so intuitive that if we love ourselves, we are more likely to love our lives. It’s almost impossible to be happy if we are not happy with ourselves. When we love ourselves unconditionally, we are more likely to experience positivity and are open to growth and new experiences. We are able to meet new situations with confidence and enthusiasm. No amount of love that anyone else shows us will be as crucial to our self-view as the love we are able to give ourselves.

You can think of living a life of self-confidence, growth, and resiliency as living life in *change mode*, which is when we embrace growth and change, feel free to be ourselves, are okay with making mistakes, and learn from setbacks rather than being defined by them. However, if you have learned or if you even perceived early on that the world is not a safe, validating place, you will carry a sense of fear and distrust well into adulthood.

When you are limited by fears and self-doubt, it is as if you are operating in *survival mode*. The goal of being in survival mode is not to grow and adapt to change; rather, this mode of living is designed to merely “get by”—by not making mistakes, not upsetting the proverbial apple cart with others, not taking any missteps that can lead to rejection or criticism from others. It becomes all about self-preservation and safety.

If you have been a victim of emotional, verbal, or physical abuse or neglect, the wounds run particularly deep, leaving you to see the world as unsafe and even downright scary. For example, if you felt like you needed to be “under the radar” during childhood to avoid getting “in trouble,” that protective behavior will prove harmful later in life when trying to build closeness and intimacy in your relationships. When you function in survival mode instead of change mode, your distrust of others and your fear of change are really extensions of a lack of confidence in yourself. Keeping up a protective shell will handicap all areas of your life.

How about you? Have you been spending too much time in survival mode instead of change mode? Have you been waiting a long time to get your life to fall into place? Do you find yourself being held back by triggers from the past? If you find yourself agreeing with any of these questions, then are you ready to learn practical skills and techniques that can help you transform your life *now*?

GIVE IT A TRY

For each of the areas of self-esteem that follow, rate how you score right now on a scale of 1 to 10. After you add up all your ratings in your journal, divide that number by 10 and locate your score on the numerical scale below. The higher the number, the more it reflects healthy self-worth and self-empowerment. Conversely, the lower the score, the more it shows that you are *surviving* instead of *thriving*.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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**Do Not
Agree**

**Moderately
Agree**

**Strongly
Agree**

- _____ I like myself and feel worthy.
- _____ I do not expect perfection and am tolerant of my imperfections and even failures.
- _____ I tend to think rationally and optimistically; I am able to distinguish between what is my perception and what is objective fact.
- _____ I tend to learn from the past rather than live in it; I refuse to live life in the rearview mirror.
- _____ Instead of being self-critical or hard on myself, I treat myself with the kindness and compassion that I would show to a loved one.

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- _____ I live present-focused and mindfully with non-judgmental awareness, rather than being focused on my ruminations of the past and anxieties about the future.
- _____ I have good self-care habits and make my health in mind and body a priority.
- _____ I feel free to express myself with confidence and honesty, without fear of the disapproval or criticism of others.
- _____ I have supportive relationships, am forgiving, and enjoy giving to others.
- _____ I am resilient and positive, and I love myself and love my life.

How did you do? In what areas do you experience the highest levels of success, and what areas need more work? Each of the ten statements above correspond, in order, to the ten chapters of this book. So if you want to get right to work on the issues that are the most problematic for you, you can start off reading those chapters on the areas where you scored the lowest. The lower your score in each item, the more skill building you need for that topic. The higher your score in each category, the more you are able to enjoy the freedom to be yourself, love yourself, and embrace your greatness with unshakable self-esteem!

Even when we feel temporarily pleased with ourselves and think that things are going well, those with low self-esteem are just waiting for the other shoe to drop. The temporary high we feel upon getting approval from others pales in comparison to the fear of not getting it the next time or, worse yet, receiving outright rejection. Neediness for approval is a setup for depression and anxiety.

Lisa Schaub, in *The Self-Esteem Workbook for Teens* (2013), reminds us that although we might feel defective, when we are born there are not two nurseries—one for worthless babies and one for valuable ones. Rather, all babies are placed in the same room and are equally valuable. Regrettably, some of us forget our worth and believe the lies we tell ourselves that we are not as worthy. Schaub makes the point that there is no doctor that would tell the parents of a newborn baby things like, “*This baby is not as good as others*” or “*This child is inferior.*” She makes the case that you believing you are not good enough and unworthy is just as preposterous as this absurd scenario. We don’t transform from being a worthy, precious human being into an unworthy one—our worth is intact no matter what.

Healthy self-esteem gives us the confidence to believe that even if things do not turn out well, we still can. Are you ready to believe in that beautiful person who is you?

GIVE IT A TRY

This exercise will tap into the power of seeing yourself as a precious being.

Step 1: Think for a moment of how you came into the world: a beautiful baby who was precious, valuable, and whole. Along the way maybe you received negative messages from your caregivers, siblings, or other family members, peers, teachers, and so forth, who did not give you the support you needed. Even those with the best intentions might not have been able to give you non-critical messages in order to teach you and shape you, leaving you with the impression that you were “unlikable” or “bad” when they corrected you. Think of any negative takeaways you have gotten and look at them now with fresh eyes.

Step 2: Write those messages down and look at them objectively. *Were they true? Are they true?* Or were those takeaways really more of a reflection of others, not you? For example, if you were teased at school for being unpopular, unattractive, or stupid, was the bullying reflective of you or of those who bullied you?

Step 3: If you happen to have photos of yourself as a baby, choose one to look at and study how beautiful and precious you were. If you do not have a photo, imagine yourself as a baby or look at a picture of a baby and imagine it is you. Hopefully, you will see the beauty in you as a small child.

Step 4: Now draw an image of yourself as a child. Art ability is not necessary—this is not a time to be critical of your drawing ability. It is an exercise to draw yourself with a fresh perspective, symbolically recreating your view of yourself in a fresh light.

Step 5: As you look at your drawing, think of the messages you received—and still receive—that you are not good enough, smart enough, attractive enough, or likable enough. How many of those messages now come from you? With each negative thought or critical message from yourself or others, rip off a small or large piece of your drawing. With each thought that undermines your self-esteem, rip off another piece and observe yourself literally tearing yourself apart! Reflect on how much of the paper is left at the end of this exercise. This represents the fragment of the remaining self-esteem that you are walking around with.

Step 6: Now think of how you can put back some of the pieces—such as with tape—with the perspective, knowledge, and support you can enlist. However torn you feel, this is the time to heal and make yourself whole again. Symbolically, piece the pieces of your self-esteem back together, with kinder messages to replace the old destructive ones.

What messages can you now tell yourself that would make you feel whole again? It is up to you now to make sure you do not allow your own inner dialogue or the words or actions of others to further tear you down or tear you up. You are worthy no matter what. Don't you deserve to feel whole?