

## Handout 8.1: Common Myths About Self-Esteem

***Myth 1: Too much self-esteem is not good; it makes one appear too self-centered and cocky.***

There is no such thing as too much healthy self-esteem. Self-esteem is feeling good about and liking yourself regardless of how flawed and imperfect you may be. It doesn't mean you think you are perfect and better than others, but rather that you value yourself.

Just as flight attendants caution that you must put on your own mask before helping small children in an emergency, you need to take care of yourself before you can take care of others. The more you like yourself, the more you can give to others—*there is just more positive stuff to give!* Cockiness is more about thinking you are better than someone else and is actually a sign of insecurity, not self-esteem.

***Myth 2: Self-esteem fluctuates with mood.***

True self-esteem is a constant, whether you are in a bad mood or a good mood. Even if you are in a bad mood, your evaluation of yourself doesn't need to change. Feelings of self-esteem are constant, although they can increase over time with a concerted effort to relinquish some of the barriers that interfere with self-esteem.

***Myth 3: The more you praise a child, the more self-esteem he or she will have.***

This is true only up to a point, and it depends on the type of praise. For example, if someone is told she is really smart because she earned an A, how will she feel when she gets a C?

Self-esteem cannot be contingent upon evaluations based solely on success, as life ensures that each of us will experience significant failure as well. Our intelligence, goodness, or attractiveness should not depend on the evaluations and praise of others. Conversely, if a child is not praised in a healthy manner and is constantly put down, his or her baseline self-esteem will surely suffer. Unconditional acceptance is the best way to ensure healthy self-esteem.

***Myth 4: Self-esteem is something you either have or don't have.***

In general, the more self-esteem we possess, the healthier we feel and the happier we are. Self-esteem can certainly increase as we dispel old myths about ourselves that we might have adopted from judgmental parents or classmates. And it decreases as we are shunned or face disapproval from people in our lives, such as our boss or our spouse.

***Myth 5: Self-esteem is correlated with wealth, looks and brains.***

Although prettier, smarter, and wealthier people appear to have enviable lives, these things are not necessarily correlated with self-esteem. None of these factors will ensure high self-esteem, although they may help slightly. What is important is having unconditional self-regard and a positive support system that allows you to feel loved and capable of loving.