

IS SELF-ESTEEM A USEFUL CONCEPT?

Extensive research has shown that confidence in oneself, performing well in activities, and respectful interaction with others are the primary components that comprise self-esteem.

Similar to other popular concepts like stress, the concept of self-esteem has been oversimplified and overused. Overused to the extent that self-esteem has frequently been held or assumed to be the determining factor for numerous behavioural outcomes such as above average academic performance, good interpersonal skills, healthy relationships, effective wellness and lifestyle choices. Regrettably, life is not so simple nor is the validity and reliability of the concept of self-esteem.

The concept of self-esteem is in fact a complex, multidimensional dynamic that involves different images, perceptions, reflected appraisals, comparisons, and behavioural practices across a variety of situations that over time result in the internalization of a sense of self-worth and confidence as part of our core belief system. This acquired sense of self-esteem generates further positive outcomes relative to our personal performance and to the others' appraisals of our abilities to navigate and manage social interactions and situations.

What Came First?

Framing any discussion regarding an individual's level of self-esteem into a *chicken or egg* scenario is not particularly helpful. For example, individuals who have high levels of self-esteem do not necessarily nor always obtain good grades just as the individuals who do in fact achieve good academic performance are not necessarily nor always the ones with a strong sense of self-esteem. Other variables can clearly be significant factors in achieving these, and similar outcomes that are frequently attributed to self-esteem.

However, we do know that high self-esteem is accompanied by a strong measure of self respect. Strong self respect, in turn, is based on two primary personal convictions -

- I do matter and have value as a person and
- Through my efforts, I can share this value with others.

Most of us grew up with the notion that our value is attached to what we accomplish and how well we please others through what we achieve. This feedback, others' appraisals of our efforts and accomplishments, reinforces the dynamic that self-esteem is a by-product of who we are as a person as demonstrated through what we actually do and accomplish as a person.



Self-Esteem Begins Early

As children, we first made observations and assessments about our personal value based on what was going on around us and the messages that we received from others, particularly people whom we deemed important and wanted to please. Over time, how others saw us contributed to how we perceive ourselves.

This emerging self-image guided us through adolescence and into adulthood. With repeated positive feedback and continued initiatives on our part, we learned to be resilient and value self-respect. For the most part, we probably liked who we were and we sought to repeated confirmation of the accuracy of our perception. The strong sense of self-respect was matched with a strong commitment to respectful conduct and communication in our interactions with others.

Self-Esteem Is Not Selfishness

Respectful self-esteem is not conceit, nor is it the same being self-absorbed. It is not about me, nor about holding resentments or playing the victim. Strong self-esteem is not inconsiderate of others. This is not to suggest that there are no disagreements or differences of opinion among those who see themselves as having good self-esteem. Healthy relationships are maintained by the ability to effectively and respectfully manage and resolve conflicts as they arise.

Good self-esteem allows us -

- to keep things in perspective, to see the larger picture.
- to choose not to personalize events or interpret interactions with others as personal attacks.
- to be accountable for our behavior.
- to admit to our errors and overreactions and to seek opportunities to make amends,
- to emotionally detach, letting go of past grievances so that we can truly move forward with confidence and respect.

Moving Away From Dysfunction

The self-esteem of children exposed to dysfunctional behaviours can be battered and bruised. However, as adults, they can learn to overcome and distance themselves from their dysfunctional past.

This challenge must be approached on two fronts-

- individuals need to reframe their estimate of their self-worth and value, and
- they must repeatedly practice strengthen their sense of their self-worth through respectful and fair feedback from others.

Although they may never totally lose their sense of vulnerability, they can relinquish the shame that accompanies past grievances and focus on the strength coming from their growing sense of self-esteem.

If you need help strengthening your self-esteem, contact your EFAP today!

YOUR LOGO HERE

For confidential assistance
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