

Myths about self-esteem

Myth #1: Self-esteem just means feeling good about yourself

Self-esteem is much more than a mere feeling — it is a tendency to see yourself as being competent, and coping with the basic challenges of life and of being worthy of happiness.

Myth #2: Only a lucky few can develop high self-esteem

People of average intelligence and average opportunities can grow into emotionally healthy adults. While some of us may be scarred by negative experiences, it is always possible to grow and improve ourselves.

Myth #3: Focussing on self-esteem leads to a “big ego”

In fact, people who tend to “big-note” themselves probably have poor self-esteem. When we are confident about something, we do not brag, boast, or get obsessive about it — we get on with living.

Myth #4: Good looks, popularity, and lots of money almost guarantee self-esteem

There are many who have physical beauty, adoring fans, and millions of dollars, yet they still live with severe anxiety or depression, or both. Good looks, popularity, and wealth do not guarantee anything if one does not have the self-esteem to support them.

Myth #5: Self-esteem is the consequence of approval from others

Yes and No. When young, our self-esteem can be influenced by others who are important to us. But when esteem is solely built on the approval of others, it crumbles quickly if that approval is taken away. It needs to be built on deeper beliefs we hold about ourselves.

The ideas and strategies outlined in this brochure are often beneficial, but are not comprehensive. Assistance from a professional counsellor may help you to make quicker progress. Remember to use your workplace EAP as a resource.

Call your EAP on 1800 056 076

Gryphon Psychology provide a free professional, independent and confidential counselling and consulting service. This service assists employees in both the private and public sectors to find solutions to any work or personal/family problems that are affecting their quality of life and which may be impacting on their effectiveness at work. If needed, our counsellors can make referrals to specialist agencies for particular problems, or for ongoing support.

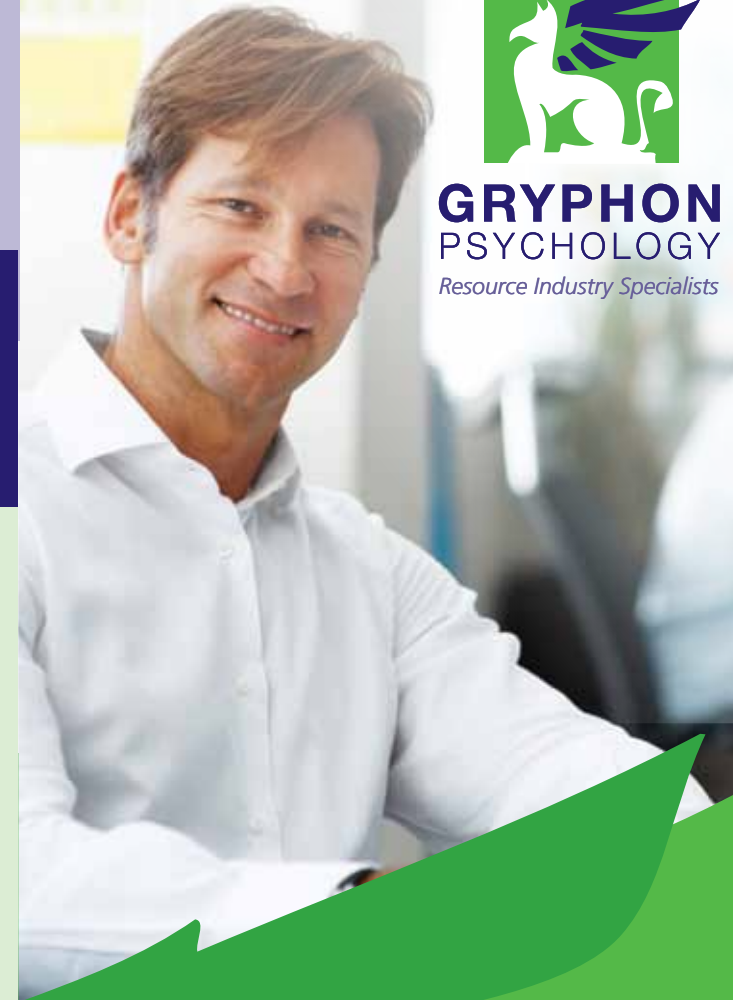
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Self-esteem refers to how we think and feel about ourselves at the most basic level. It effects our ability to relate to other people and to the world in general. With firm foundations we can build strong intimate relationships and we can feel successful in our work and satisfied in our relationships. With shaky self-esteem, our ability to relate to others and deal with difficult situations is handicapped.

Self-esteem versus social status

It is important not to confuse self-esteem with social status or financial wealth. Self-esteem built on external things (such as a job, or a fancy car, or even the respect of other people) is at great risk if that external thing is taken away. For example, many people suffer huge loses in self-esteem and self-worth after job retrenchment, or death of a spouse. True self-worth is built from the inside and not on external things such as how much money we make, or how popular we are.

Damage to self-esteem

Researchers and therapists have found that early childhood experiences can have a big effect on our level of self-esteem. Punishment from Dad, rejection from Mum, or simply not enough touch and affection can all lead to negative conclusions about ourselves, which in turn damage self-esteem.

Even in adolescence and adulthood we are not immune to 'attacks' on our self-esteem. Teasing at school, unpleasant dating experiences, getting fired from a job, unemployment, marital separation, lack of friendship — these can all damage self-esteem. An important factor is the individual's interpretation of the experience. Put another way, the crucial factor is what we say to ourselves about those experiences.

The inner critic

Become aware of your inner critic – we all have one – it slyly makes negative judgements about you. Notice when the inner critic compares you to others: "She always looks much better than me", or "He's so confident and smart while I sound like an idiot". Your inner critic sets standards you can't keep, reminds you of your failures, and exaggerates them. It even makes you forget about your positive attributes!

Once you begin to look for these self put-downs, you can begin to notice the critic and you can begin to counteract it. You can stand up to the critic with a short, powerful statement to yourself such as "Shut up!", "Get off my back!", "Cancel!" or something even more lively if you wish.

Affirmations

Another useful technique, particularly at the time that you have caught yourself being self-critical, is to affirm your own worth with something positive about yourself. These affirmations are short, positive statements about yourself, and phrased as if they are already true. For example, "I am now enjoying my life and my relationships" is more powerful than "I am going to be happy one day". While it can be hard telling yourself positive things while you feel lousy, persistence pays off, particularly if you use some of the other strategies below as well.

Visualisation

You can also use visualisation — the deliberate use of pictures or images in your mind. When you add pictures to affirmations, you're really beginning to program your thinking. For instance, you may want to picture yourself as a confident and worthy person, who makes a positive difference to people in your life. Visualisation tends to be particularly effective when combined with deep relaxation.

Other techniques

Self-esteem does not change overnight, and a broad approach to changing it over time is needed. Some additional strategies you might incorporate into your life include:

- Keeping a journal of all your successes (especially good to look through when you're feeling low)
- Mirror exercises (talking to yourself out loud and in a positive way in front of the mirror)
- Reviewing your day every night (letting go of what did not go well, and acknowledging what did)
- 'Cleaning up' any broken agreements/promises with others, and
- Trusting your intuition.

Some areas to focus on

We can apply the above strategies to numerous areas of our lives to create strong self-esteem, including:

- Optimism — having an outlook which focuses on the positive
- Confidence — belief in achieving a positive outcome
- Emotional balance — feeling comfortable with your emotions
- Self-direction — developing plans/direction in life, and acting on them
- Mistakes — accept them as opportunities to improve
- Strengths — knowing what you do well
- Co-operative — working well with others and helping their progress.

These are just a few — find ones that are relevant for your life circumstances.