

STEPS primary care mental health team, Glasgow

Self-Esteem

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This booklet is about self esteem. You may be reading this because you think your self esteem could be better.

The booklet will:

- Explain what self esteem is and how it develops
- Talk about things that can affect your self esteem
- Give you ideas on what you can do to boost your self esteem.

PART 1: SELF ESTEEM

- 'What I think of myself'. Some quotes from people.
- What is Self Esteem?
- How Self Esteem develops
- What else can affect your self esteem?
- What can happen when you have low self esteem?

PART 2: BOOSTING YOUR SELF ESTEEM

- Get positive
- Take care of yourself
- Fight the inner critic
- Stop comparing yourself
- Don't avoid things
- Making Plans
- Get the help of others

What others did to boost their self esteem

PART 1

Self Esteem

'What I think of myself'

“If I have done something well, it is like there is a wee voice in my head that says ‘and who do you think you are’. I can’t take a compliment. I think ‘if only you knew what I am really like’. I tear such strips off myself. I would not talk to any other person like I talk to myself”.

Marie, 55

'I go on and on at my husband to tell me that I look OK if we are out. I do it so much, he gets angry. Yet I still ask. It's better when he is there. When I pick the wee one up at school on my own, I make sure I don't get there until the bell rings so I don't have to talk to the other parents waiting at the gate.'

Julie, 37

“I feel so bad about myself. My self esteem and confidence are down the tube. I know I have 101 things to do but nothing ever gets done these days. I feel I am letting them all down. I can't give myself credit for anything.”

Paul, 39

'If I walk down the street or I am in a club, I think people look at me. I think they are thinking that I am ugly or stupid or weird or that I don't fit in here. I think they are looking down on me. I become really aware of myself. And then it affects the way I walk as I am so tense. My whole face freezes and that affects the way I talk. If two people are nearby, I'm worried that they are talking about me'”.

Sam, 19

“I just go along with people all the time. I can disagree with what someone tells me yet all I do is nod my head and don't say a word. I want to put over my own views but I can't. I can't stand up for myself at all”.

Rashid, 25

‘I hate to see my boyfriend talking to a good looking girl. If they are laughing, I feel like dying. I feel like this even if he talks to my best friend. I go off my head at him as soon as we get out. If he goes for a night out, I bombard him with questions. I try to catch him out. I check his clothes. I go through his wallet. I even check the numbers on his mobile phone. I know he is sick to death of it but I can't stop. I don't know why he stays’.

Sharon, 31

These six people all talk about how they feel about themselves. They may focus on different things, but they all have something in common. They have low self esteem.

What is Self Esteem?

Self esteem is what you think of yourself. We all have self esteem. We all have an opinion of ourselves.

What you think of yourself can be based on many things.

For example:

- How you were brought up and treated as a child
- How you did at school
- Your relationships with other people (friends, family, partner)
- The job you have
- Where you live
- How successful you think you are, or can be
- Your strengths and weaknesses
- What you believe others think of you

People can find that how they feel about themselves can change from time to time. Yet some people find they don't feel good about themselves a lot of the time. They may have low self esteem.

How Self Esteem develops

Your childhood and teenage years are very important for your self esteem.

What happened to you and how you were treated during that time will affect how you think of yourself as an adult.

Experiences that can lead to...

Good Self Esteem

- You were listened to.
- Praised
- Given attention
- Felt loved
- Got along with friends
- Success at school, or sports
- Treated with respect
- Had chances to do things

Low Self Esteem

- Criticised a lot
- Ignored, neglected, or abused
- Being bullied or made fun of
- Made to feel that not being perfect was a weakness
- Not doing so well at school, or in sports
- Being different to those around

What else can affect self esteem?

You will form basic ideas about yourself from what happened to you in the past. Yet what happens to you as an adult can also affect your self esteem. For example:

- Excessive or harsh criticism
- Not feeling that you fit in, for example, at work, or in a new area
- Physical, emotional, or sexual abuse
- Your appearance
- Financial worries
- Stress at work, or losing your job
- Difficulties with those close to you (for example, your family, friends, or partner)
- Separation, or divorce
- Traumatic events (for example, accidents, being assaulted, someone close dying)
- Illness, or health problems

You will have an idea of what you are actually like and what you would like to be. A big difference between these views can affect your self esteem.

You also have a view of how others see you and what they would like you to be. Again, if these are different, they can affect what you think of yourself.

What can happen when you have low self esteem?

Your self esteem will affect how you **feel, think and act**. It can affect your confidence, how you get along with others, and how you do at work.

Thoughts

- You may feel that you are not good enough
- You may worry what other people think of you
- You think straight away that you can't do something
- You might think you are too fat, ugly, or old
- You may blame yourself for things that have happened, even though they may not be your fault
- You may dwell on criticism and mistakes you have made
- You may feel shame
- You may get frustrated at yourself, or others. You might feel angry.

People often refer to these thoughts as 'a wee voice in my head'

Body

- You may have trouble with sleeping
- You may feel tense, or on edge
- You may feel tired
- You may feel panic in certain situations, for example, when meeting new people
- Then, you may feel sweaty, dizzy, or breathless
- Your heart may beat faster.
- You may be more aware of your body, for example, when blushing.

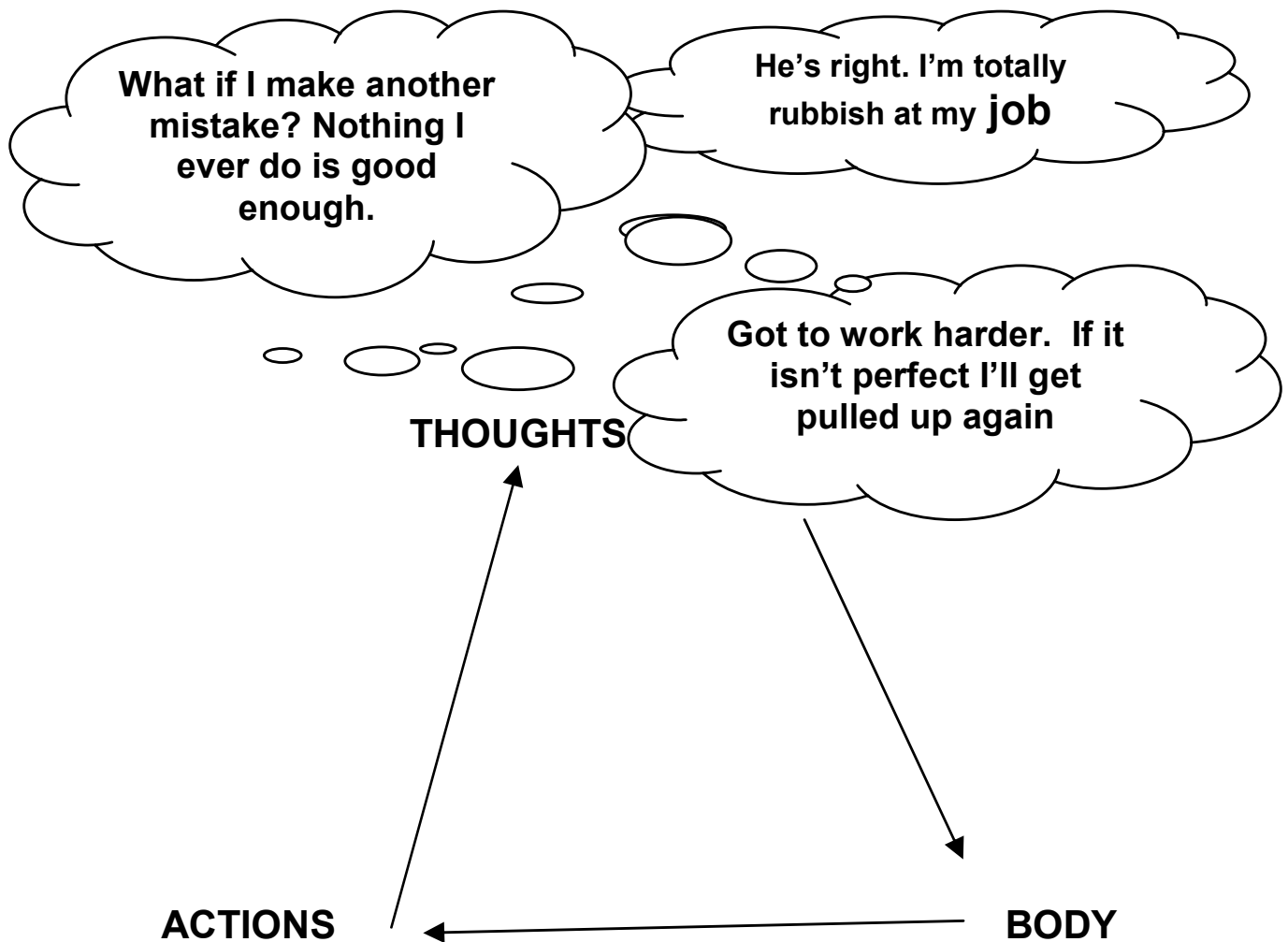
Actions

- You may avoid going out, or seeing people.
- You may find it difficult to make decisions.
- You might work too hard, or try to be perfect at everything you do.
- You may hold back from doing things, or speaking out.
- You may try to please everyone.
- You may avoid opportunities, e.g. promotion, or holidays.
- You may be over sensitive.
- You may shout at others, or get into arguments.
- You may allow others to do things to you that you do not want them to
- You may avoid sex, or feel that you have to have sex.
- You may eat too much, or for comfort.
- You may watch what you eat very closely.

'The Vicious Circle'

Low self esteem can mean we do things that make us feel even worse about ourselves. This creates a vicious circle. Look at Robert:

Robert's boss has pointed out some mistakes he has made



Work too hard
Try to get everything right
Miss that night out to sort out the office
Is so tired that he almost makes another mistake
Snaps at people

Trouble sleeping
On edge
Can't concentrate

Right away, Robert takes his boss's comments to heart. In his head this criticism means that he can't do his job. If Robert's self esteem was a bit low to start with, this comment would have been another blow. What he thinks about himself starts to affect what he does. What he then does confirms what he thinks about himself. The vicious circle keeps going.

It can be difficult to break this vicious circle and feel better about yourself. The next section looks at what you can do to boost your self esteem.

PART 2

Boosting your self esteem

Steps to Better Self Esteem

STEP 1 *Get positive*

STEP 2 *Take care of yourself*

STEP 3 *Fight the 'inner critic'*

STEP 4 *Get the help of others*

STEP 1 - Get Positive

A. Write down a list of things you like about yourself

Write down even the smallest things. It can be easy to forget about these things when your confidence is low.

What have you done in your life that you were happy with? Have you done something well? Something that took a lot of effort?

Have you had to deal with some tough things in your time? Think about how you faced that. What does it say about you?

For example: I'm a good friend. I'm a good cook and people say they enjoy what I have made. I am handy with a hammer. I coped really well after Johnnie got made redundant.

If you can, ask people you know what they like about you and what your strengths are. Write these down too. It may be hard to start with. Stick at it. It will get easier once you get going.

B. Reward yourself when something goes well

Made that phone call and got something sorted? Finished that report? Got all the shopping and housework done with time to spare?

Whatever has gone right, pat yourself on the back. Take the night off. Treat yourself to something.

Keep on reminding yourself when things go right.

C. Forgive yourself when you cannot get everything right

If you are not used to giving yourself credit, this can be hard. It is easier to criticise yourself than give yourself praise.

You can't be perfect all the time. The perfect person does not exist. When things don't go the way you planned, ask yourself:

- Was there anything that did go ok?
- Was it all your fault?
- What went wrong and how can I change it next time?
- Has the world caved in because that just happened?
- Will it still matter in a few years?

STEP 2 - Take care of yourself

A. Basic Self Care

People with low self esteem tend to think they don't deserve things. That they are not worth it. Some people may not look after themselves.

Looking after yourself is important. It will help give you the energy to tackle other things that are going on in your life.

- Try and get enough sleep.
- Eat well
- Try and get some exercise. For example, go for a 15 minute walk each day.
- Practice good personal hygiene

B. Plan fun and relaxing things for yourself

Take time out

Are you always on the go? Feel you always have to be doing things? Or have you lost that 'get up and go'?

Make time to do things you enjoy. Stick to your plans.

Ask yourself: When was the last time I did something I enjoyed? What do I find relaxing?

It does not have to be something big. Perhaps you could go and see a film, spend an afternoon in the garden, or meet up with a friend for coffee. Whatever you like doing - Set a time and stick to it. Do something you enjoy on a regular basis.

Try out new things, or take up old hobbies

Is there some hobby you once had but have stopped? Would you like to take it up? Was there a reason for giving it up? What was it? Have things changed since then?

Is there something you have had an interest in? Never felt up to it? Try giving it a go. If it does not work out, at least you tried.

Why not volunteer for something? Voluntary organisations are always looking for people to help out. You don't tend to need special qualifications. Some people find helping out a couple of hours a week makes them feel quite good about themselves.

STEP 3 - Fight the inner critic

The 'inner critic' never has a good thing to say about you. That 'wee voice' in your head just keeps on winning. Getting you down. Well the 'inner critic' is not right all the time. It just thinks it is.

A. Challenge Your Thoughts

- Think about the times you have felt down about yourself.
- **What have you been thinking?** Write down these thoughts.

" I am a fat, stupid cow. Who would want me there looking like this"

" I'm not even going to try; I'll just sit it out. I can't do this stuff"

"Why are they looking at me like that?! What have I done wrong now? They just think I'm useless"

- **What were you doing at the time?** Write this down too.

"I was meant to be going down to the social club. I didn't have any clothes that fitted me right.'

" I was at a training course"

"I was at my parent's house, watching telly. I'd had a bad day."

- **What happened as a result?** Write this down.

"I decided not to go out in the end"

" The others finished the task. I couldn't get started on it. Failed the module. Now I need to do it again."

'After a while Mum asked what I was sulking about. I said nothing. I stormed off.'

You will get a list of what you think about yourself and what situations get those thoughts going. Now ask yourself:

- What says that my thoughts are right?
- What says that they are not?
- What would someone close to me say?
- If someone else was thinking all this, what would I say to them?
- What is the worst thing that could have happened?
- Which point of view seems more reasonable?

(see previous page)

“The worst thing? Well nobody would have talked to me. But people always talk to me down there. They did last week”

“Maybe if I had given it a go, I would have been a bit more confident. The trainers were helping other people out. So maybe they weren’t sure too”

“Mum phoned up later. We talked about me storming off like that. She said she was thinking what I might want for tea when she looked over. Then she remembered she forgot to pick up the potatoes. That might have been when her face screwed up. I was just mind reading”

B. Stop comparing yourself

Having standards can be a good thing. However, you might be setting these standards too high. What happens then is that you never quite match up to what you would ideally like to be.

Try this task:

Write down the first words that come to mind when you read the statements in the boxes below

What I think I am like just now	What I think others think of me
What I want to be like	What I think others would like me to be

Most people feel uncomfortable reading negative thoughts they have about themselves. This gives you an idea of how what you think about yourself can affect how you feel.

- How true in real life are the things you have listed?
- Are any of them out of your control, or seem unrealistic?
- Are you setting yourself up for failure?
- What would be a more helpful way to think about yourself?
- Is there a way to achieve some of the things you have listed?
- Or, is there a middle ground that seems reasonable to aim for?
- What would someone who knows you say about what you have written?

C. Don't Avoid Things

It might be easier to avoid doing things, or seeing people. You don't want to set yourself up for a fall, right?

If you avoid facing up to things, you will never find out if you could have done something well, or coped.

- What have you avoided doing recently? Perhaps you have not felt up to it?
- What did you fear would happen? If you had done it, what were the chances of that happening?
- How could you have coped if it had?
- What could you have found out about yourself?

D. Make a plan

By now you may have a better idea of the times when your self esteem affects what you do.

- Find out whether your view of yourself is right or not. Plan beforehand how you can try and handle situations you are not comfortable with.
- Think of what you would like to achieve. Start with small goals and work your way up to the bigger ones. Or split the bigger goals into smaller ones.
- Try out the plan. If it works out, great! Keep on doing it. If it doesn't go that well, ask yourself what you can do next time to feel better about it. Try it again.
- When you notice the negative thoughts start to nag you. Ask yourself some of the questions above.

E. Quick Fix

Some people find 'self talk' can be helpful.

This is when you make up phrases that you can use quickly to ease the doubts in your head.

Below are some examples:

- 'I've been here before. It wasn't too bad'
- 'Give it a go'
- 'I can do this'

Think up a few of your own. After using them, review what happened.

STEP 4 - Getting help from others

People with low self esteem often get wrapped up in what others think of them.

This means they don't ask for help. They feel they don't deserve it. They think they have to deal with it on their own. They think they will look stupid.

Others may have felt the same way. It might be the case that what you think is going on and what they think is totally different. You will not know until you ask.

- Pick someone who you trust to talk to about things.
- Think of whose opinion you really value. Who really matters?
- Ask family and friends to tell you what they like about you and what you are good at. You might not even have picked up on these things!
- Some people might find it less scary to work through the questions and tasks in this booklet with someone they trust. Do this to start off with. Then give it a go on your own.

If you are a friend, or relative of a person with low self esteem:

- Try and listen.
- Remind the person of what people like about them, and what they like about themselves.
- It can be easy to let the person avoid things. Remind them it will not do them much good in the long term.
- Their lack of confidence could upset or annoy you. Think back to the last time you doubted yourself. The person you care for has this feeling a lot of the time. Try to understand that building up their self esteem may take a while.
- Encourage them to fight the negative thoughts.
- Praise them when things go well.

In summary...

- **Remind yourself of the things you are good at, did well, or enjoyed.**
- **Learn to stop blaming yourself for everything that happens.**
- **Take care of yourself.**
- **Stop comparing yourself to others all the time.**
- **Challenge those negative 'nagging' thoughts that creep in.**
- **Face what you fear. Don't avoid things.**
- **Plan to find out if you can cope.**
- **Talk things over with someone you trust.**

What others did to boost their self esteem

Marie, 55

I couldn't take a compliment. So I wrote down all the things people have said to me. I wrote down all the good things I had done. All the crap I'd dealt with for years. All the nagging thoughts in my head. I found it dead hard to start with. I asked my boy if he could think of any. He came up with a few. I sat and thought about them for a bit. I asked myself why people would say nice things and not mean them. I figured out they must have. I've still got the notebook. I look at it every wee while, mostly when I'm feeling a bit down.

Julie, 37

I get down about how I look. Since having the wee one, I put on a bit. I'd stopped going to the hairdresser, painting my nails, you know. What was the point? So I made an appointment with the hairdresser. I cancelled the first time. I felt worse. I phoned up again. This time I got my husband to drop me off. It made such a difference. I bought some new clothes. My friend and I have started going to an aerobics class on a Monday. Then there was the school. I made myself go five minutes early one day. I've never been so nervous! I forced myself to say hello. One of the mums introduced herself and we got chatting. It went ok. The next day I went 10 minutes early. I thought she wouldn't remember me but she did. I went round hers for a cuppa the other day. We've got that bit in common. I'd never have known that if I hadn't said hello.'

Paul, 39

I knew I was avoiding doing things. Everything just seemed to be building up. I didn't know where to start. I tried to keep a note of those things that I tended to shy away from. I also wrote down a 'To do' list of everything I still had to do. I started by doing the simple things on the list. I noticed the more effort something took; the more likely I was to not do it. The booklet said to break things down into smaller tasks. I really have to force myself to do some things. I have little phrases I say to myself when I start to doubt myself, like: 'Just do it', and 'You never know'. I'm starting to find that the more I get done, the better I feel.

Sam, 19

Well, I stopped going out as much. I sat down with my best friend. We talked about what people talk about in clubs. He said that if I didn't fit in there, the bouncers wouldn't let me in. He told me what he thought about when he was walking down the street – what he had to get at the shops, what he had to get done at home, whether people were looking at the huge spot on his nose. I asked a couple of other people. I thought they would think I was barmy, but they said that other people are too busy worrying about themselves. I reckon I was being a bit sensitive. The next time I was out I checked out other people. They seemed more bothered with themselves. When I started to tense up, I tried to concentrate on what others were saying. It distracted me. I kept telling myself 'I'm ok' and the worry past after a while.

Rashid, 25

I read up on self esteem. Lots of what was said was true of me. I was never allowed to speak up in the past. My opinion didn't matter. I decided to try something out. Just to see how I got on. I was working and the guy I was with wanted to use another part. He was talking rubbish. It was just the two of us, so I didn't have an audience. I suggested something else. My heart was thumping. I thought he would have got angry with me. but he said he hadn't heard of it. He asked me what it did. I showed him how you fitted it and he seemed alright. I started there and worked my way up. I don't speak up all the time, mind. But I'm a lot better.

Robert – Beating the vicious circle

“ I've always prided myself on my work. I suppose I'm a bit of a perfectionist. It's all or nothing with me. The wife put her foot down after a while. She said I was awful to live with. That we never saw each other. She said I had to do something about it. I started by cutting down how much work I did at home. I made an appointment with my boss. I really worked myself up beforehand. I thought he was going to say I needed to pull my socks up. Wrong! He said that generally he was happy with my work and that I was a real asset to the team. I thought he might have noticed a dip in my work since I stopped taking things home. He said that some of the stuff I'd done in the last few weeks was really good though. Mind you, I feel a lot less tired and stressed out. Maybe the two went hand in hand”.

Sharon, 31

I have never felt good enough. I spend so much time thinking about what other people think and how I come across. I always compare myself to other women. I sat down with my boyfriend. He said that if he didn't want to stay with me, that he would have left by now. I set myself a goal of not looking at my boyfriend's mobile phone for a day, then a week. I was quite worked up for the first few days. At the end of the week, my boyfriend let me look through the numbers. When he went on a big night out, I phoned up my best friend and we went out. She knew what was going on. When I got quiet, or started checking my phone, she pulled me up on it. She made me turn the phone off once! I've started working on the things I like about myself and what I am probably better at than other people. When I start to feel down, I remind myself of all the things that I have done well.

Further information, websites & contacts

Books/Booklets

Overcoming Low Self Esteem, by Melanie Fennell. (1999). Robinson Publishing Ltd: London.

A more detailed book. For those who want to read about self esteem in more depth.

10 days to great self esteem: 10 easy steps to brighten your moods and discovering the joy in everyday living, by David Burns (2000). Published by Vermillion.

Building Self Esteem, by Helen Jenkins and Melanie Fennell. (2004). Available from Oxford Cognitive Therapy Centre, Clinical Psychology Dept., Warneford Hospital, Oxford, OX3 7JX. Tel: 01865 223986. www.octc.co.uk

This is a booklet which gives information on self esteem and ways to help build it.

Organisations

The Volunteer Centre, 84 Miller Street, Glasgow

0141 226 3431

www.volunteerglasgow.org. *Opportunities for volunteering in the Glasgow area.*

MIND (National Mental Health Charity)

www.mind.org.uk

MIND has a wide range of information leaflets, including 'Self Esteem' and 'How to Assert Yourself'. They also have information on various issues and contact details for relevant services.

Websites

www.netdoctor.co.uk : This website covers all health issues. It includes information, advice, and self report questionnaires.

Direct link to the self esteem page:
www.netdoctor.co.uk/sex_relationships/facts/selfesteem.htm

www.channel4.com/health.

This website has sections on mind, body, stress, family, and so on. Includes general advice, ways of coping, and personal stories.

Tackling other problems

Many people find that having a problem with low self-esteem is only one problem among others. If you feel you would like to tackle problems such as stress, anxiety, poor sleep, panic, depression, alcohol, etc., then STEPS might be able to help.

Ask at your GP practice for more information or take a look at our web site (www.glasgowsteps.com) to find out more.