

# Creating Self Esteem

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This article summarizes practices and beliefs to increase self esteem right now.

**Question:** *Progress in my life has been dogged by very low self esteem – always as a child put down by my mother and lately by my husband. Do I have to go through life like this? Help?*

**Answer:** My heart goes out to you. My answer is going to be very direct. I offer it to you in the spirit of encouragement and to give you a sense of hope.

No, you do not have to go through life like this. You have everything it takes to make the progress you want to make. You lack nothing. You just don't know it yet. Here are nine practices and beliefs that you can begin to cultivate right now to help you improve your self-esteem and march boldly in the direction of your dreams.

## 1. Let go of the past:

The number one most important thing you must do in order to progress in life is let go of your past. Often we are led to think that we can't find love, enjoy a fulfilling career, or make progress in life because of the abuses and dysfunctions we suffered in the past. We become convinced that we are defined by what we were deprived of in our past. But the past is the past. It exists only in a fantasy. We turn the *fantasy* of the past into a present reality by constantly focusing on it. What we tend to do is unconsciously model our adult relationships after the relationships we suffered through as children. Then we repress the bad behavior that we are guilty of and project it out onto our partners. Thus we perpetrate the past by interpreting the present in past terms.

All of us come from "dysfunctional" families. Certainly some of us experience more psychological adversity in life than others. Yet, there are countless examples of people who come from extremely abusive parents and almost unbelievable backgrounds of privation and suffering and rise above their circumstances to achieve success in life. Often siblings who suffer the same abuses in early life have noticeable differences in self-esteem and their ability to cope with life. Fierce determination not to be defeated by life's challenges is the difference that makes all the difference. No one can erase the *influences* of the past but everyone can decide whether those influences will continue to rule them in the present. To do otherwise is to say that you are powerless over your own life.

## 2. Forgive

Forgiveness is the primary way for letting go of the influences of the past. It's easier to let go of the past when we think of life as a classroom that presents us with lessons to learn. Our number one lesson is always to learn love and forgiveness. Until we learn to love and forgive those who mistreated us in the past we are doomed to attract the same lesson into our lives in the present. The fact of the matter is our present relationships are healed as we let go of resentment over our past relationships. It doesn't mean that we condone mistreatment. It means that we rise above it. When you forgive your mother

you will discover that you will stop projecting her behavior onto your husband. Ironically, when you forgive your mother you will also be forgiving yourself because the grievances we hold against our parents are unconsciously held against ourselves. We are *all* more likely to gain self-esteem when treated with love and compassion. Surprisingly we also gain self-esteem when we treat *others* with love and compassion. Your relationship with your husband can heal when you stop finding fault with him and see him through the eyes of love and forgiveness. Everyone is fighting a difficult battle, him included. You don't have to forgive him until you're ready. But as you release your grievances you will make more room in your heart for love. The moment you let go of past grievances is the moment you become free to experience a miraculous new present.

### **3. Become Conscious and Assume Responsibility**

One of our main responsibilities in life is to expand our consciousness as we mature. The wider vision that arises from expanded consciousness increases our level of responsibility for the life we are creating and the lessons it presents to us. Our goal is to rise from dependence to independence and ultimately to freedom. If we want to get on a higher plane in life we can't keep blaming the amorphous *they* for who we are. Our lives are either *theirs* or ours. It's up to us to decide. Most of us believe that we are responsible for our behavior but not for our thinking. As *A Course In Miracles* teaches *we are first and foremost responsible for what we think, because it is solely at the level of our thinking that we can exercise choice*. As we become more responsible for our thinking and the choices we make we become masters of our own fate.

We are in this world to do just that. We are *not* in this world to judge our parents or our spouse or to make sure that *they* learn *their* lessons. We are here to become conscious of *our* lessons, assume responsibility and perfect ourselves. It is our responsibility to give our *all* and learn from the classroom of life. When we fail to do this we betray our Selves and injure our self-esteem.

Enlightenment requires that we not betray our Selves. We further this cause by paying attention to the life we are creating. Psychological pain is always a sign that we are not paying attention at some level. Just as ulcers tell us that we're not paying attention to the stress we create in our lives, so poor self-esteem tells us we are not paying attention to how we are creating *it*. Paying attention does not mean you identify with your pain. Just as you are not your ulcer or your broken leg or your headache, you are *not* your psychological pain either. You are the person above your pain who can pay attention to taking the steps to promote healing and prevent it from occurring. You are someone and something much grander than your lack of self-esteem. Your true Self is powerful beyond measure. To paraphrase Marianne Williamson *our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate but that we are indeed powerful beyond measure*. To think anything less is not humility. It's arrogance, because it gives more weight to *your* opinion than to that of your creator in whose image you were made.

### **4. Take Action**

In order to pay attention and live consciously and responsibly we must take action. When we put off making amends with our parents or fail to admit our part in being put down by our spouse we are failing to live consciously and responsibly.

You can take action by putting your attention on what you *want* instead of what you don't want. The law of consciousness says that whatever we focus on in life expands. Put your focus on your singular desire to improve your regard for yourself. A higher part of you knows that you are not a victim. You can never be "put down" without your consent. You are a powerful, vibrant, spiritual being capable of changing your mind and your life. Demonstrate your new regard for who you *really* are by taking care of yourself. Eat well. Get proper rest. Exercise. These things will improve your reputation with your Self. Learn to meditate. Meditation increases your ability to live consciously. It is the gateway to connecting with the miraculous power of your spiritual Self.

### **5. Ask for Help**

It is our task in life to become free of the limitations we set upon ourselves. Often this requires that we ask for help from a professional who can assist us in getting a new perspective on our problem and who can hold us accountable for our thinking. Taking action in this way demonstrates our fierce determination to change the direction of our lives.

When we rely strictly on our own strength we have every reason to be apprehensive, anxious and fearful. Let us admit to ourselves that the fear-based thinking of our ego creates all of our problems. To rise above the battlefield of life we must ask for help from a higher source. Do not forget that you are a spiritual being capable of tapping into a higher power. Ask for help through the power of prayer. As *A Course In Miracles* teaches *prayer is the medium of miracles*.

Typically, we have to hit rock bottom before we turn to prayer. It isn't until we fall to pieces, that we fall to our knees. But the moment we do is the moment our lives begin to turn around. Until then it's as though we've been waiting on God. The truth is, He's been waiting on us. It isn't that He's masochistic. It's just that love never forces itself. Love waits to be welcomed. When we finally do invite God's help it's because life has convinced us that of ourselves we can do nothing. Our understanding of our problem is too myopic and our interest too self-serving. God, on the other hand, understands every facet of our problem and can resolve it for the good of all concerned.

### **6. Gain a Sense of Humor**

Don't take yourself so seriously. Cultivate a sense of humor about your shortcomings (as well as your husband's and your mother's). All of our wisdom comes from our foibles and the mistakes we make in life anyway. Count them as blessings. Learn from them. Often our lack of self-esteem is a smoke screen for fear of failure or fear of success. Thus we live more to avoid the pain of life than benefit from its lessons. We seek to escape real intimacy and on some level seek to be taken care of by others. Instead of being invigorated by the challenges of life we shrink from the unknown and the

unfamiliar and look for ways to take ourselves off the hook. All it takes to change this is a little willingness to do so and a good sense of humor.

### **7. Take Your Focus Off Yourself**

The grand mistake fostered by lack of self-esteem is self-absorption. Self-absorption leads to a sense of isolation, and loss. Take your focus off yourself. Real freedom in life isn't experienced until we get over ourselves and put our focus on something bigger. When we do this we realize that our problems do not stem from what we are *not getting* from life but from what we are *not giving* to it. The less self-absorbed we are and the more aligned we are with the principles of conscious living, forgiveness and *giving* instead of *getting*, the more empowered we become.

### **8. Live With Purpose**

If you want to make progress in life you must live it with a sense of purpose. To do otherwise is to live it without meaning. Look at your relationships as gifts that have been given to you to help you heal your psychic wounds. See every relationship as a laboratory for becoming conscious, taking responsibility and learning your lessons of love and forgiveness. Ask yourself what do I want to achieve through my relationship? What am I doing to contribute to its success? Cultivate the capacity of being ruthlessly honest with yourself about your contribution.

Nothing happens by accident in life. Know that you are on a grand, heroic mission to discover yourself and become a better person in the process. Make this the purpose of your relationship. Discuss this purpose with your husband. Declare your desire and intention to have a common goal, open communication, and an equal investment in its purpose.

## **9. Visualize The Life You Want To Lead**

Visualization is our god-given ability to attract what we desire into our lives. As Aristotle said, *the soul never thinks without a picture*. Try this exercise.

Close your eyes and create a picture of the person you want to become. See in your mind's eye what you will be doing...who you will be with...what your body will look like...how you will sound...how you will stand...how you will breathe.

Now recognize that the only thing that prevents you from stepping into this picture is you. Ask for a miracle to come into your life and heal your perception of yourself and your relationships. Surrender to God every person, every dream, every heartache, every joy and sorrow connected with your lack of self-esteem. Tell Him that you want to trade grievances for miracles. Ask that He help you to remember that your real purpose in your relationship, and in life, is to love and forgive. Affirm that you have the power through Him to do this.

Now take in a deep breath, open your eyes and live your life *as if* these changes have already occurred, because they have. Practice this exercise regularly, especially at night before you fall asleep.

No, you do not have to go through life the way you are. You have the capacity to change your mind and change your life. You can have all the self-esteem and all the freedom you are willing to create for yourself. Right now, today, you can begin to march boldly in the direction of your dreams.