

Boost Your Self Esteem

Catapult your self confidence



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents	1
DOES THIS SOUND LIKE SOMEONE YOU KNOW?	3
UNDERSTANDING YOURSELF	5
Understanding How Your Mind Works	6
Four Core Emotions	10
Anger	11
Sadness	11
Fear	12
Joy	12
Five Stages Of Gaining Control Over Your Emotions	14
Start listening to your emotions	15
Understand the intensity of the emotions	16
Let out the strong feelings	16
Understand the meaning of the emotions	17
Work through your emotions	18
Cooling Down Activities	19
BELIEVE IN YOURSELF	21
Tuning Into Positive Self-Talk	21
Tuning Out Negative Self-Talk	23
BRING BALANCE BACK INTO YOUR LIFE	27
Your values	27
101 WAYS TO CATAPULT CONFIDENCE	31

DOES THIS SOUND LIKE SOMEONE YOU KNOW?

Jeremy was always a sensitive child and did not find it easy to make friends with other children. The youngest of four siblings, he found it easier to be by himself. His parents found it difficult to communicate with him, but they were so caught up with their own financial and personal turmoil that they never probed further. In school, Jeremy was constantly bullied which further dented his self-esteem. By the time Jeremy was an adult, he seriously lacked in self-confidence so much so that he could neither retain a job for long enough or stay in a relationship. He stayed away from most family gatherings but that made things only worse. Jeremy realized the never-ending cycle of his emotions but however hard he tried, he was not able to come out of this.



Michael was Jeremy's boss at his new place of work and realized both the potential in Jeremy and the troubles he was going through. He saw how Jeremy was afraid to voice his opinion in public and that he lacked in self-confidence, even though he was very quick to learn, was competent in his job and had very good ideas at times. Michael understood that Jeremy was suffering from low self-esteem and needed help. He introduced him to a support group. Furthermore he suggested coaching and also got him some self-help books.

The difference could be seen in just a few weeks. Jeremy was far more confident, was not afraid to socialize and made new friends in the office. Though he was stung very quickly by criticism, he would manage to get over it and get work done. Soon, he enrolled in a community college to get a degree and even brought his parents over to see where he worked. Michael knew that Jeremy had miles to go but that the worst was over.



Jeremy's story is like that of many others who lack self-confidence, are not sure of their own capabilities and tend to be over critical of their failures. They suffer from low self-esteem and in some cases, lose control over their lives and slowly sink into depression.

However, in most of these cases, all that is needed is some solid understanding and some guidance. Most people with low self-esteem can start the process of restoring their self-confidence and regaining control of their life, with some very simple steps – the first of which is to gain a better understanding of themselves. By understanding how similar we all are as human beings and also how the natural rules of the universe works to impact our results, the emotional turmoil can be changed to an upward spiral into confidence, boosted self esteem and improved results!

Most people are unable to or do not want to recognize their negative emotions. Perhaps they have never learnt of positive ways in which they can manage them. As a result, they cope with these feelings in different ways. Some just try to deny them or shut them down completely by using cigarettes or alcohol or through eating, even not eating. Some act on their emotions almost spontaneously, saying or doing things that they come to regret later. None of these reactions ever leads to positive outcomes.

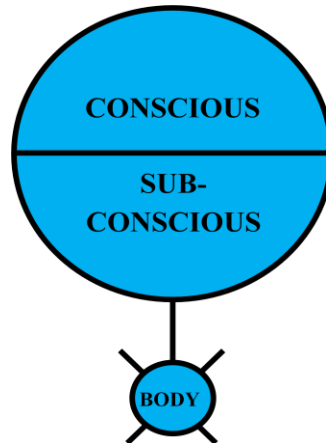
The first thing you may want to realize is that while you cannot always control what happens to you, you can certainly control your response to the situation. It **IS** possible to learn to stay calm and manage your feelings. The way there goes over gaining more knowledge of and higher awareness of yourself and your mind-body interactions and reactions. We are all more similar that you might imagine and the core of mind body interaction is following universal laws for all individuals in all cultures, absolutely regardless of upbringing, language, class or economy.

Many a times, your response is based on your interpretation of an event and this can be very different in a time when you are feeling self-confident and good about yourself while it will be very different in a time when you are feeling very low. As a result, you need to control the thoughts that any event will trigger and the kind of conclusions that you may draw about the event, especially if it is related to your sense of self-worth.

Let us explore a little deeper how the mind works in relation to emotions and self esteem.

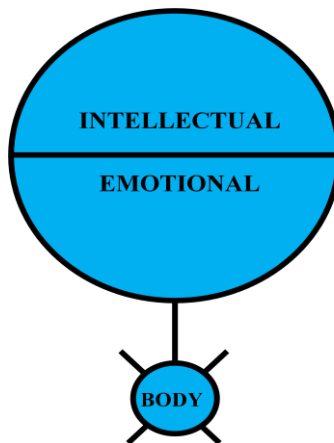
UNDERSTANDING HOW YOUR MIND WORKS

Since we as humans are highly visual, and our minds work accordingly it makes sense to have a visual picture of how mind and body interacts in order to deliver the goals we desire. I have come to love this little drawing, the Stickperson.

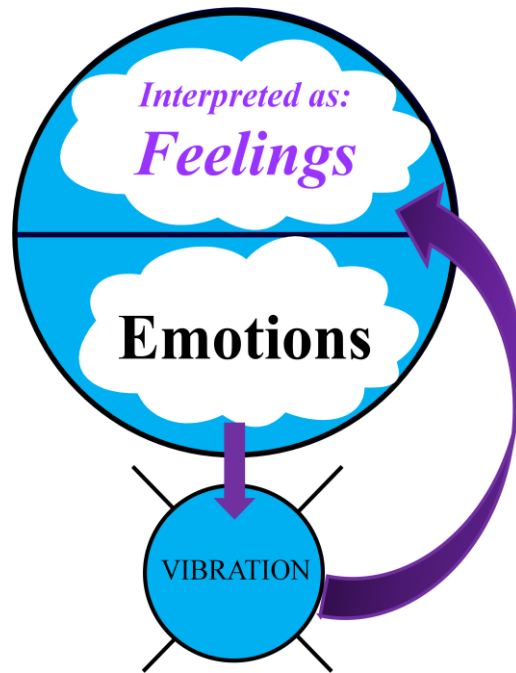


Let the upper large circle to represent your mind. The bottom small circle represents your entire body, including head and all.

The conscious part is also the intellectual, thinking part. The subconscious is the emotional part of our mind.



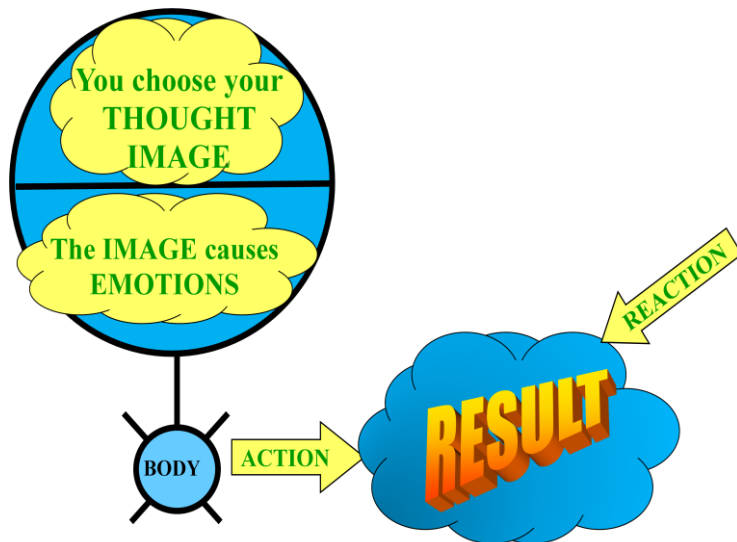
With the conscious mind, you can select your thought image. Your image creates emotions in the subconscious mind. These emotions in your subconscious mind are interpreted as “feelings” by the conscious mind. So when you say: I’m so upset, it means that you consciously recognize and acknowledge that your body is in an upset vibration, or upset mood, right now. See picture below.



Your emotions are expressed in your actions. That's how the universe works, no way around it. Say you are in a cinema watching a thriller. You begin to identify with the victim being chased, and subsequently the hairs on your arms stand up, you get goose bumps, and your body stiffens.

Your actions in turn generate a response from your surroundings or the universe, which in turn is the reason for your results (i.e. circumstances, conditions and environment).

In the example above, your partner at the cinema senses your stiffness and anxious breath, and puts the hand calming on your leg. The situation immediately loses a bit of the tension and you relax and start to breathe more calmly. See this picture to the right.



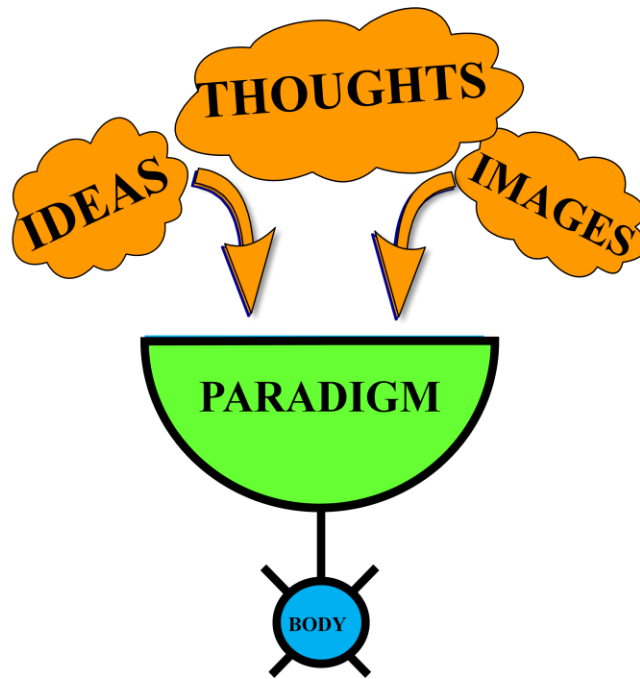
So let's go back to the "I'm upset" - statement. You can choose to express it as "I am upset", which is virtually a self-fulfilling prophecy. "I am" is the most powerful affirmation there is. You can also use another option. You can take it for what it is: Your body happens to be in an upset vibration right now. You can even say it to yourself, exchange a bit of the self talk. "I happen to have a negative vibration in my body now, what shall I do about that?"

From this point, you are in a much better position to start to explore the different avenues to raise the vibration your body is currently in. You could decide to sing, dance, read a good humorous book. Meditate. Look for some good friend that is helpful in raising your vibration, simply by being with them, not by off loading your anxiety/anger or resentment. The latter is doomed to be a continued downward spiral.

OK, remember that our emotions are enormously helpful for us in order to deal with different situations automatically. You don't have to remember regulate your body temperature and take off some layers of clothes when you are too hot, you do it automatically when you feel warm and uneasy.

Your emotions are only problematic for you when they over-interpret situations for the worst. Such interpretation is much based on what we call reference frame, or our paradigm. What is that? Well it is all the things you been fed, mostly by others, while growing up. Since your conscious mind is really undeveloped as you arrive as a baby on the scene, you take much of what you get fed for granted, without own reflection. That's how universe works.

As children we have been granted a mind which is optimal for imitation. And so we grow up watching, listening, smelling, tasting and touching. We soak in the input and experiment with the imitation until we please our surrounds and authoritarian persons in our upbringing. We form our paradigm, or our reference frame, which is the filter through which we subconsciously interpret events. See picture below.



Since the conscious mind is not fully developed until we are 6-12 years, before that period, our method of learning is primarily based on how the subconscious mind works.

OK, based on that, you have formed a paradigm within which you interpret your world. How much of what you have been fed, as comments, sayings, statements about you and the world are relevant and beneficial for your today? Much of it is really contradictory to what we stand for and what we want to do, be and have! And it originates primarily from other people. It does not originate as much from within you as you may think. And most important, it does not have to be static. You can choose to reprogram your paradigm. Imagine what it would feel like, not having to get all frightened or upset when the boss runs in to yell at you that he really needs your output now and that it's too late anyway and it's your fault and I don't know what. Imagine being able to be cool in that situation, to stand your ground and respond calmly that you had got a deadline for the output for tomorrow and even though it may not be fully ready in all details it might be used with a few finishing touches. He can get it for printout in 20 minutes. Would that feel good? Would you feel empowered? Well, that's the promise of what you can achieve by acquiring higher awareness of:

- Yourself,
- Your triggers and
- The enormous impact of your thoughts on your emotions and results.

When you experience any kind of emotional response, you need to be able to respond to it positively or at least constructively. The only way you can do that is if you acquire good knowledge of what situation triggers what kind of emotional response in you. You need to understand what degree of emotional response is triggered; and how you would like to be prepared to handle them.

Advance decision making is a very good way of setting intentions, which enable you to stay calm in many situations. By having a decision already made in advance, you do not need to worry or negotiate with yourself and others. Perhaps start to vacillate and get all uneasy. It may be an advance decision about taking alcohol when dining out. Or smoking in the car, or similar situation.

FOUR CORE EMOTIONS

The four core emotions that everyone is affected by are anger, sadness, fear and joy. If you understand what your reactions are and work on moderating them as well as managing them, you will feel more in control of yourself and more confident of handling various situations. Let us understand what each one of these emotions is, how each one of these emotions helps us and where they may tend to harm us.



Figure: Four core emotions

ANGER

When you are angry, you are motivated enough to change something or correct something in your life that is not working for you. However, many times, you may just be feeling hurt or sad or lonely, and may be covering it up with anger. If you do not get to the root of what is making you angry, you may tend to get more resentful, hostile toward those who you feel do not understand you and you may even sink into depression.

SADNESS

When you are sad you tend to reflect more, you think of the significance of something that has not turned out the way you wanted it to. Or you may have lost something or someone. It is natural that when you are sad, you seek solitude. Being alone for some time helps you to work out the significance or at times the insignificance of your loss and prepares you for future disappointments.

A stint in solitude is good because you do not have to force yourself to pretend to be anything else when you are obviously still hurt. Once you are feeling better and stronger, you can speak to friends or family.

However, it is very important that you are healed in a finite time. If your feelings of sadness are not going away or in fact, are only growing stronger, you may need help immediately and being alone does not necessarily help in such times.

FEAR

While many consider fear as an emotion for the weak, this is what protects you from taking unsafe risks. Fear of something forces you to be cautious and to take all necessary precautions. Fear is particularly normal when you are caught in unfamiliar situations. This certainly does not mean that you are incapable of doing or achieving what you set out to do.

Adequate amount of fear is quite realistic and may actually end up in you taking extra efforts in preparing for an unfamiliar situation. For example, if you are presenting a marketing report for the first time to your top executives, then your fear of messing it up will force you to work overtime on the presentation.

Obviously, your efforts will bear results and your fears did end up achieving something positive for you. However, unrealistic fears in situations where there is very little or no risk at all, can cause great mental stress and also lead to disease.

JOY

This is a very important emotion because it is a collection of all the positive feelings that we experience when things are going well for us. It is important to understand what gives us maximum joy because under different circumstances, it helps to create thoughts and situations wherein you can feel the same emotions of contentment, happiness and joy.

Expressing Emotions

Everyday you go through one or more of these emotions or through a combination of them, with varying intensities. There are other emotions that may affect you like love, excitement, horror, guilt and so on. The main problem arises when you do not state specifically what bothers you or do so only through your body language or facial expressions. When something is troubling you, if you just state that you are 'upset', you are not clearly conveying what is bothering you and this ends up confusing not just others around you but yourself as well. Being upset can cover many different emotions of different intensities.

The best place to start taking control of your emotions is to find ways of expressing clearly and unambiguously what you are feeling at that point. If you do not find ways of expressing your feelings in words they will still come through actions like rolling your eyes or banging a door which can leave behind more unresolved emotions.

This ends up confusing even those who are close to you and you end up feeling frustrated that no one understands you. Using words to express clearly what you feel will help you relieve yourself of your pent-up emotion, will help you crystallize what is important to you and what is not, you will understand what works in what situation, what you can live with and what you can do without. Most importantly, others can then start understanding you better and there is better communication all around.

One of the best tools I know for expressing your emotions is the so called Non-violent communication, a communication process developed by Marshall Rosenberg. It is also called compassionate communication. Essentially, you observe an event, you express what you feel about it, avoiding judgment and you kindly suggest what you prefer the other person should do instead.

You may want to say:

- “When you leave the dirty dishes on the kitchen table, I feel upset because I have a need to live in a tidy home. I would prefer if you put away the dishes in the dishwasher when you are done eating.

instead of:

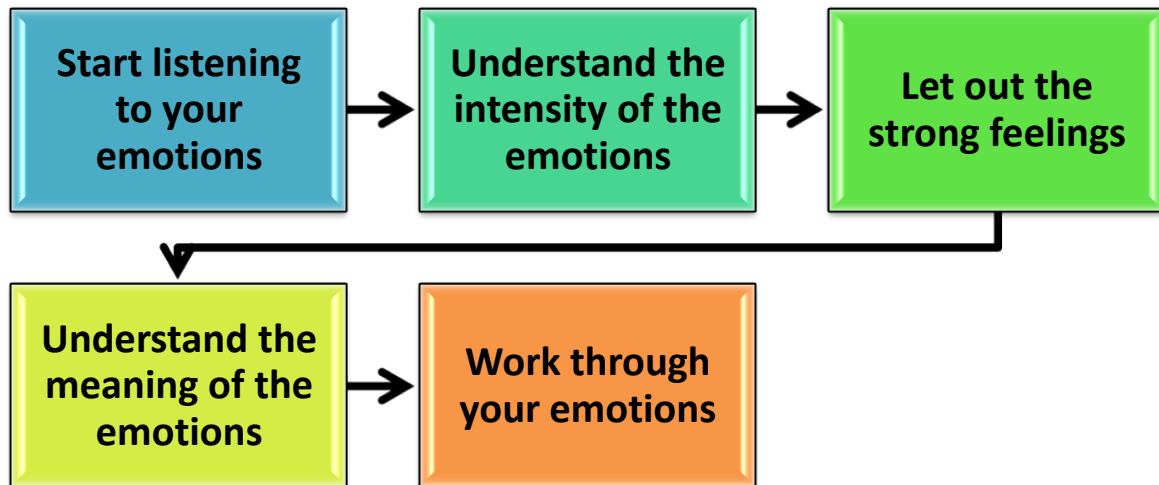
- You are so lazy, you always leave the dirty dishes on the kitchen table.

In order to understand what the right responses to our emotions or feelings should be, one should first know the following.

- Emotions can have both a positive and negative impact on you. They are essentially messages that are conveying something to you and how you interpret them and use them will decide how you move forward in life.
- Listening to and understanding your emotions will lead to great empowerment as you will soon learn to trust your emotions more and more rather than be afraid of them.
- Understanding your emotions will enable you to make the right decisions for example when making new friends, deciding what career options to choose or where you would like to move.
- Your emotions will warn you of upcoming risks and also prepare you for many exciting opportunities.

Five Stages Of Gaining Control Over Your Emotions

To gain control over your emotions is to regain confidence in yourself and is one of the first steps in the process of healing your self-esteem. Here are the important stages of the process.



START LISTENING TO YOUR EMOTIONS

- There is no right or wrong emotion. They are just a reflection of how you truly feel about something and so you cannot do much about how you react. External events and happenings often have an impact on us and it is difficult to stay unaffected. However, what we could do is try and understand why we are feeling what we are feeling. If you are able to clearly identify and name the emotion that you are going through, it will help you to make better decisions the next time around. It will also help you realize what situations are important to you and what are not, so that you take extra care the next time around.
- It is very important to remember that the responsibility of how you feel lies solely with you, other people are not blame for how you feel. You may often hear people say 'You irritate me when you do that' but you are really not responsible for how the other person is feeling. It is you who are always responsible for how you feel and for your actions.

- It never helps to deny the emotions that you are going through. This can only lead to more suppressed resentment, a confusing state of mind and even physical stress. However intense the emotions may be and however uncomfortable, it is always better to acknowledge them without anyone criticizing you for feeling the way you do. When you can experience uncomfortable feelings without the pressure of any blame being attached to it, you can also experience more peace and joy.

UNDERSTAND THE INTENSITY OF THE EMOTIONS

- A situation can create emotions ranging from very mild to very strong feelings in you. When you start experiencing a surge of emotion, take a minute to understand what level of emotion you are experiencing. Are you just mildly annoyed or completely ticked off? How would your friend or partner react in such a situation? It is important to remember that not every person has the same kind of reaction or emotional response. Therefore, it helps to know how you react to a particular situation. This also helps in coming to terms with others' strong reactions while you may not be experiencing the same kind of emotion in identical circumstances.
- When you experience strong emotions, you may try to become aware of the specific circumstances that brought it about. Then try to label it so that you know what causes this specific emotion. For example, waking up late in the morning or being unable to finish up some work can cause anger.
- When you are feeling good and energetic and if you are able to recognize that early on, you can make use of this to accomplish things that you had been putting off for some time. Similarly, if you are able to tune into any negative emotion early on, you can control it or manage it before it goes out of control. However, if you find yourself experiencing stronger emotions in the same situation, then you may need professional help to figure out what needs attention.

LET OUT THE STRONG FEELINGS

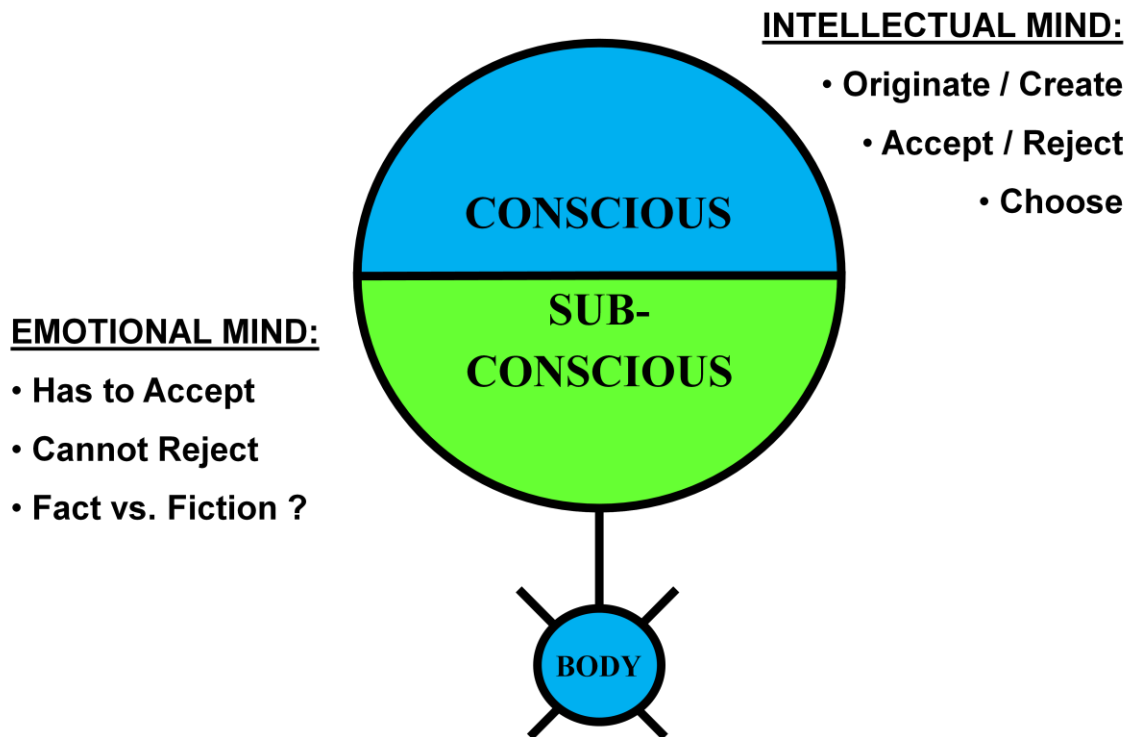
- It is usually not difficult to miss a strong emotion – you will have a knot in your stomach, sweaty palms, a pounding heartbeat or a dry mouth. Throwing tantrums or smashing things are not the best way of letting off steam nor is providing an explanation saying ‘Oh, I was just so upset’ When you are angry, first find ways of cooling down and let your emotions calm down.

UNDERSTAND THE MEANING OF THE EMOTIONS

- Once you have calmed down sufficiently, give some thought to what the emotion and the intensity of it means. If you are sad, you should try and understand what exactly it is that you are disappointed in. If you have been unsuccessful or lost something, does it really mean so much to you? How will you comfort yourself in such situations? Is there anyone you can turn to for help and comfort?
- If it is anger that you are feeling, why don't you see what it is that is angering you so much? Is there anything that you can change from your end or something that you can fix so that the situation does not repeat? If the situation is not in your control, maybe you can take steps to being caught in such situations where you are not in control and yet you are sufficiently impacted to feel anger.
- When you are happy about something, go ahead and enjoy yourself. But also ask what exactly about the situation is making you happy. This will help you re-create such situations even when you are feeling down so as to bring back happy memories.
- If you are feeling afraid, it is best to understand what it is you are afraid of – a person or certain consequences. Will planning a little more help ease your fear? Also, if you clearly analyze what the consequences maybe in different scenarios you may realize that even the worst-case scenarios are not so bad after all. Further, if you talk positively to yourself or some friends, you may feel less stressful.

You will benefit long term from learning more about how the subconscious mind works in order to reprogram the paradigm, simply because the paradigm tends to repeat the same emotion in similar situations over and over again.

So, your conscious mind can originate ideas and it can choose to accept or reject ideas or opinions. It has the ability to choose



WORK THROUGH YOUR EMOTIONS

- It is best to be able to work through your emotions. When you feel joy, you laugh; when you are sad, you cry. All these are emotional releases and help you to calm down quickly.
- Other ways in which you can find emotional release is through music, sports, poetry, talking to close friends or relatives, anything that helps you control your emotion.
- Understanding your emotions and talking with others about how they can help you manage your emotions will not only help boost your self-confidence but will also make others respect you more.

COOLING DOWN ACTIVITIES

When you find yourself in the throes of an emotional outburst, you can follow some practical techniques to just ‘chill out’. Here are a few of the more effective ones.

- When you start getting agitated, take deep breaths. The old adage of counting up to 10, works even now – do so breathing deeply every time. This will help you calm down or at the least distract you, reducing the intensity of your emotion.
- Indulge in some kind of physical activity – walking, jogging, and even dancing. Physical activity automatically triggers the stress response of the body, which reacts by releasing endorphins. Endorphins are the body’s natural pain relievers and mood elevators and will immediately result in you feeling better about yourself and more in charge of your emotions
- Have a sense of humor. While every situation may not be treated light-heartedly, try to look at things with a sense of humor. Humor too releases endorphins in the body.
- Use any kind of relaxation techniques to calm down – music, candles, yoga, tai chi, visualization methods.
- Start a new hobby or if you already have one, make time for it. This will not only give you a sense of fulfillment, it will also distract you from negative thoughts.
- Write down your thoughts in a journal
- Try reading an inspirational book or listening to a soothing tape.
- Have a nice, long bubble bath or just a hot cup of tea.
- Make time for some meditation or just reflection in solitude.
- Become a child again and play with a child or a pet.
- If you have a friend or a close family member who is also a good listener, it may help to talk things over with that person. While this will not only help you vent

your anger, fear or frustration, it will also help you get another perspective on the situation. In fact, looking back, you may find that things do not look so bad after all.

- Always try and plan ahead – it is best to be prepared for any situation as even simple things like hunger or tiredness can increase everybody's stress.

All these cooling down strategies will help you to not only release your emotions but also give you valuable time to come to terms with them and sort them out as much as you can. This does not mean that following any one of the above methods will solve your problem or that there will not be a recurrence of a similarly emotional situation. These techniques provide you with ways to clear your mind so that you are in control of your emotions all the time and are able to make decisions made on solid facts and not high-running emotions. This is the first step to start feeling confident about your decision-making abilities and about feeling good about yourself.

A person with low self-esteem has low self-belief. It is difficult for him to believe that he has the ability to do something or do it right and about taking the right decisions. However, self-belief can be restored quite easily by two very important processes –

1. Tuning out negative self-talk
2. Tuning into positive self-talk

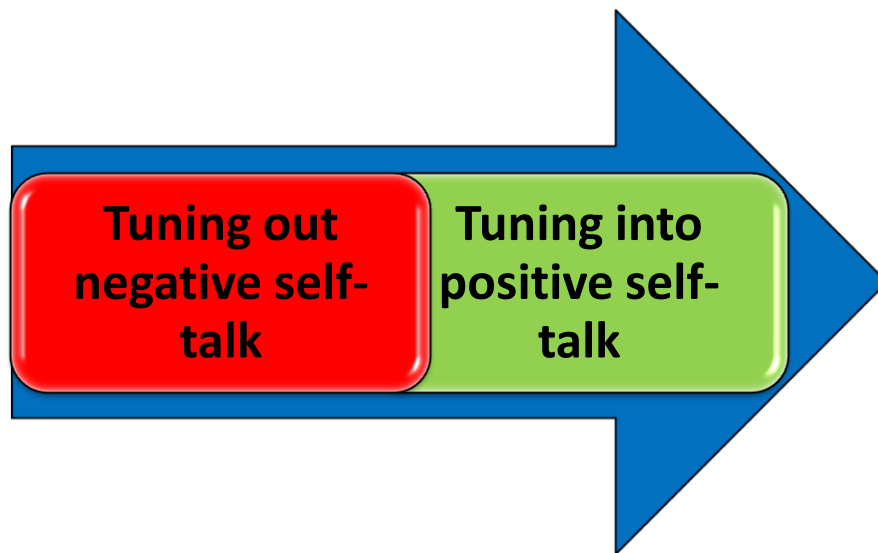


Figure: Restoration process for Self Esteem

TUNING INTO POSITIVE SELF-TALK

Positive self-talk may not be able to change your life overnight but it is a great way to start influencing the way you think, you feel and thereby the way you act. To begin with there are a few examples of what your positive self-talk should be about.

- Helping you imagine a positive outcome. Start out by having a very clear picture of a successful outcome – do not yet worry about how you will get there. Research has shown that our subconscious mind is very powerful and once the seed of a successful result is placed in there, it will take root and will guide you in various ways to help make this come true. For example, if you are shy but have

to make a presentation before your seniors. Imagine a successful presentation wherein you are confident, able to answer all questions and with everyone complimenting you on a job well done.

- Making affirmations. You have to make affirmations to yourself from time to time. Affirmations are merely positive self-talk statements, which usually start with 'I', are brief but clear and always talk about the present. Let us give you a few examples, I am healthy and strong, I can make a difference, I am a good friend, I have unique talents and abilities, Even if I make mistakes, I am a good person, I want to grow and I am willing to take risks for it.
- Staying positive. Instead of stating things in the negative, put a positive spin on it. Do not say, 'I am not afraid...' Say 'I am confident while making my presentation'. Similarly, keep the statement for today, not tomorrow, not later, now! This will help your subconscious mind to realize that the result you want is for today and for now. Use the powerful words – I am....- rather than the tentative could, should, can or will. I am a good, confident speaker who can capture the attention of a large group of people.
- Keeping it simple. Using brief sentences helps your subconscious to remember them better. Long rambling sentences are quickly forgotten and may even help you get more confused. Use simple sentences to start the reprogramming of your thought process.
- Keeping it believable. Your self-talk has to be about believable, reachable goals. They have to be believed by you and hence it is important that you decide how high or low your goal should be. Just because someone else says so does not make the change you are looking for easily attainable nor out of reach. Decide on what you want for yourself and if the goal seems a little tough, it is all right if you believe that you would like to and you can achieve it. What others say does not really matter.
- Trigger happy emotions. Talk about your positive aspects a lot. This helps trigger happy and joyous emotions in you, which will give you more energy to achieve things. Say, I am a supportive and understanding partner; I am a loving and nurturing parent.
- Writing them so that you can see them, not just think them. You can get a variety of index cards in the market. Buy a set that is convenient for you and

write down every affirmative thought on separate index cards. When you can spare the time or when you are feeling particularly bad, take them out and read your affirmation loudly for yourself.

- **Affirming and Re-affirming.** Now comes the interesting part. For about 30 consecutive days, read these affirmations once every morning immediately after waking up and once every night, just before you hit the bed. It has been proven that your brain is the most receptive to ideas in the early morning and just before you go to sleep. Do not take long – about 30 to 45 seconds should be enough to read each affirmation and visualize yourself in that positive frame of mind. See the picture clearly in your mind, feel the positive, almost joyous emotions running through you. Take a deep breath; enjoy the moment and then head for the next affirmation.
- Be absolutely open to all possibilities and believe that it is possible to make changes, whatever stage of life you may be in.
- Once you have your affirmations ready for you, it is best that when you are visualizing them, you imagine a kind, supportive voice saying so. Think of any person who has been good to you or inspired you – maybe your parent, friend, coach, teacher. Now imagine them saying these same affirmative things to you. They would say something like ‘Go on, give it a try. You have all the qualifications necessary – you certainly deserve this job.’ ‘Good job, well done’. Imagine how buoyed up you would feel when you hear someone say things like this and how motivated you would feel going forward.

Use this method of affirmations and positive self-talk to continuously improve your self-image and improve your sense of worth.

TUNING OUT NEGATIVE SELF-TALK

Negative Self-Talk, as you can imagine has the complete opposite effect of positive self-talk. Negative self-talk leads to confusion and indecisiveness with the result that you are not able to take control of your thoughts, your emotions and hence your actions. This results in you withdrawing within yourself, withdrawing from people, even your close

friends and family, avoiding situations that may new to you. You may react to your fear and your increasing loneliness by being sarcastic and blaming others.

Imagine how you would feel if someone said this 'You idiot!' What would be your thoughts, how would you feel and what would you do about it? Now think of negative self-talk as more or less your own voice speaking in a similar manner to you. You can hear or feel this inner voice, which seems to keep criticizing you for every failure or sets you up for failure when you set out to do a job. Does this sound familiar to you? You have just appeared for a job interview, which you think, did not go well. You may be having these thoughts in your mind – 'I am such a fool. There is no way I can get such a good job, not after I missed out on so many questions. Questions to which I am supposed to know the answers. I am hopeless...'

More often than not, your negative self-thoughts will keep harping on past failures; will conspicuously ignore anything good happening or any successes, setting up impossible to achieve standards of perfection and lead you to believe that others also think negative thoughts about you. In fact, you may find yourself thinking more often than not, rather than going ahead and doing things.

While it is best to tune out negative thoughts from your mind, they do give us a clue as to what may be going on in our minds.

- Negative thinking may help you understand that there are certain situations or certain issues that make you angry, sad or feel hurt. You need to understand these emotions and find a way of releasing them.
- When people with low self-esteem start to think negative thoughts, they are more likely than not, to sink further into negative thoughts. They will experience more emotions of anger, anxiety and sadness.
- Negative thoughts at time prevent you from even making an attempt at something new – if you are extremely anxious about some result, negative thoughts will keep coming into your mind, telling you that there is no way you can ever succeed in your attempt. You will listen to this voice and give up trying and of course, your anxiety is completely relieved. This kind of negative thinking can be fatal because it is self-fulfilling. You keep getting anxious of trying something new for fear of failure, your critical voice tells you, you are bound to fail and you never attempt it. How will you move forward or grow if you are

afraid of failure all the time? In fact, this attitude may become so much a part of your life that this is the only self-image you will have of yourself.

- It is entirely possible that as a child you were not subject to the encouragement or positive thoughts that every child should be provided. However, that should not be reason for you to feel negative throughout your life. It is possible to make positive, good changes in your life at any stage. All you need is the knowledge of how to do so and the determination to make it happen.

Along with positive self-talk and avoiding negative self-thought, there is one more step that is closely associated with these processes and that is the ability to not be afraid of making mistakes. As you continue to grow and learn in life, you will make mistakes, sometimes small and inconsequential, sometimes large and life altering. What is important is that you treat each and every mistake as an opportunity to learn and become a better person.

When you are trying something new, something risky there will be many who will not share the same enthusiasm with you. They may express anything from grave reservations to frank criticism of what you are going to do. Some of these may even be people who are close to you. Even healthy relationships are not exceptions to these kinds of fears and negativity. At such times, you have to reaffirm to yourself that you are capable and worthwhile and that whatever the result, it is not going to affect your sense of worth. Once you feel so secure of yourself, you will be able to handle any mistakes that you make in a positive manner.

This applies even if your mistakes tend to affect something or someone. Looking back, it can seem obvious why a certain mistake was made or how it could have been avoided. But you would have made a decision based on the information that was available to you at that point of time and it does not behoove anyone to criticize you needlessly, when the same things can be said in a more positive manner. On the other hand, if you have made a mistake, it is your responsibility to acknowledge that a mistake had happened, apologize for the consequences and accept that you will have to do whatever is necessary so that it does not repeat or to remedy the situation. Taking responsibility in this manner for mistakes that you may have committed even inadvertently not only boosts your own self-esteem and self-respect but will also make others respect you more. And you have to agree that this is so much more better and cleaner than trying to deny that you had anything to do with it or making excuses or worse yet, blaming others for the mistake. If you feel the need to respond to intense, continuous criticism, take

deep breaths so that you stay calm, collect your thoughts and express your opinions clearly and politely, protecting your self-respect at the same time.

Finally, just as you would expect to be treated in a positive manner when you have made mistakes, it is best that you let go of others who have made mistakes in the same way. Treat them with compassion and understanding, like a friend who has made a mistake and needs guidance. Forgiveness can take a load off your mind and will restore a lot of positive energy in you.



BRING BALANCE BACK INTO YOUR LIFE

Many times, we spend an entire lifetime chasing after a dream not to realize till it is too late that you have missed out on some very important things in life. It is very important that you decide on what kind of choices you want to make for yourself before it is too late.

Life nowadays is fuller, more exciting than ever before. However, this also means that there are too many things demanding equal time and energy from you. It is very important that you take time to reflect for some time on what exactly your priorities in life are. Of course, things change as life progresses. While a young child may be a priority now, a career may be more of a priority 10 years later. When you are thinking of priorities, think of what you want in the next year, two, five, ten or twenty years. Make sure you are specific and then write them down. Of course, your priorities depend a great deal on your values and what you think is important to you at particular stages in life.

YOUR VALUES

Your values are the principles that you believe in or that you think are important. What these principles are, will decide your set of values. It is very important that you are clear about your values, as they will play an important role in building your self-esteem. Your values will guide you in your decisions and the goals that you set for yourself. If you are sure of your values and you stick by them, you will make decisions that are wise and are right for you. This will go a long way in you feeling good about yourself.

The kind of values that every person develops is normally dependent on the kind of needs the person has.

- Small children will grow up with the value system of the people they love and seek approval from.
- Teenagers are more questioning of their parent's values and go more by what their peers and friends believe in.
- As a worker, you may find yourself moved by the values and beliefs of your colleagues or seniors.

Thus, as you go through life and its various stages, you gain a variety of experiences. Your value system is a sum total of what you believe in because of all these experiences.

You should however be aware that some of these values might become very rigid and restrictive if you are not careful.

- It is good to put your child's education on top priority but pushing the child to go into areas that are neither suited to the child's abilities, learning style or personal interests can only cause more harm than good.
- Fitness is fine till a certain level. Trying to achieve a perfect toned body and resorting to under-nourishment or steroids to achieve this may again only end up causing more damage.
- Wanting to have a clean and orderly home and inculcating such discipline in children is a good thing. However, to push it to limits where the smallest amount of dirt can cause scenes and great heartburn will only turn your family against you. And after all children should be allowed to be children.

The best way to decide your values is to aim to do the following:

- Let your values permit you to meet your basic needs in the areas of importance to you but at the same time stay in balance with the needs of others.
- They should not restrict you from asking for help when you feel you need it.
- Your values should be your own and should not just be handed down from your parents or your society, never to be questioned. They may be shaped by many of your experiences but you should construct the final mold.
- Your values should still give you the freedom to make mistakes, the courage to take responsibility for them and the capability to learn from them.

- Your values should enable you to set goals for yourself that are achievable, realistic and yet fulfilling.

Some of the areas about which you may have strong values and think have major importance in your life could be:

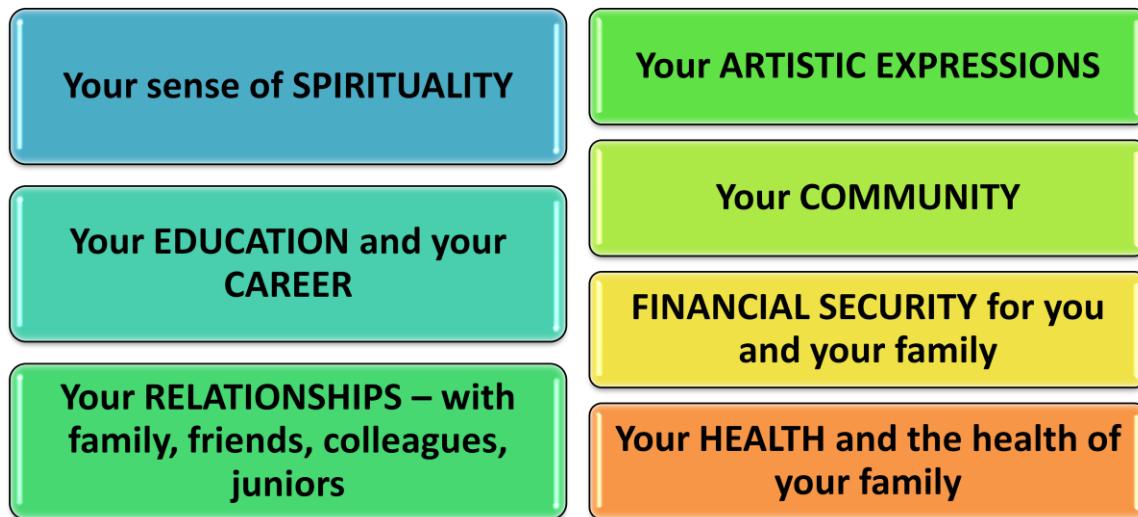


Figure: Example of areas of value to you

You can decide on your priorities by answering some simple questions about these areas.

- Which one of these do you think matter to you the most at this stage of life and which would you regret compromising on?
- Do you think you are spending enough energy and time in the areas that you value the most?
- Are you spending too much time on your career while caring too little about your health or your family? Will you not mind it when you have grown-up children whom you never had chance to know and now that they are moving out of your life, you wish you had?
- Are you spending too much time on leisure activities and almost none on reflection or meditation?

- Are you equally satisfied with all areas or do you experience an imbalance like this for example:

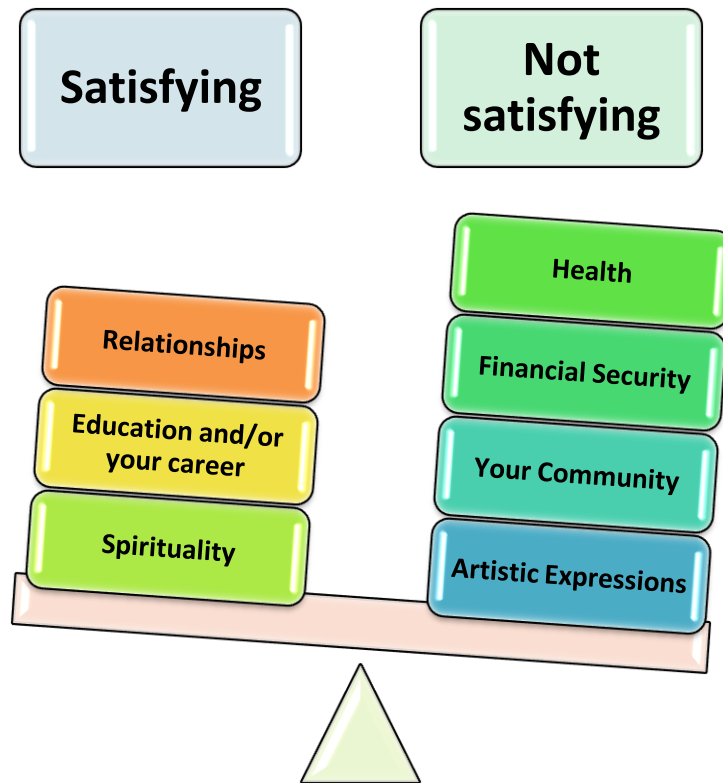


Figure: Example of balance in important areas of life that you value.

Answering these simple questions will help you decide on what the areas are and what the things that you care deeply, deeply about. This will help you crystallize your priorities for you so that you can discipline yourself to work hard in achieving those priorities.

Understanding and being able to work towards goals that are connected to your personal and/or professional values will not energize you when you are working but strengthen your self-esteem.

101 WAYS TO CATAPULT CONFIDENCE

Here are 101 activities that will catapult you towards absolute confidence once applied consistently.

1. Avoid unfair comparison of yourself with others. While trying to seek inspiration from others is a positive sign, using comparisons to criticize yourself or to put yourself down is not.
2. Stop using negative statements. Do not say 'I can never lose weight'; 'I can never afford to buy a fancy car like my cousin'.
3. Affirmations are one of the best ways to reprogram your mind. Use brief, positive statements about yourself to reinforce your self-belief and build your self-esteem.
4. Keep repeating affirmative statements whenever you have the time, but especially during early morning and late night times. Researchers claim that those are the best times to introduce your brain to new ideas and new thoughts. As your brain gets used to the thoughts you introduce to it, you will be surprised to find yourself finding new creative ways of achieving your goals; ways you had previously never imagined.
5. Self-confidence is not arrogance. Arrogance is an attitude of people who feel they are superior to others and behave in such a manner. Being self-confidence is being secure in your position and yet being understanding of others.
6. Keep a journal in which you can write what you have experienced everyday. If you have had a pleasant experience, write down the exact circumstances that made you feel that way. This will help you recreate the situation whenever you read the passage and will help you feel good just as you had on the first day.
7. Use the journal to also note down uncomfortable emotions that you may have experienced. Again note down specifically what the circumstances were which made you feel the way you did. Now try to answer whether you can control or manage your emotions better the next time you come across a similar situation. If you feel you cannot, you should explore whether you can avoid being in such a situation. All these writings will help you gain better control over your emotions, your actions and hence make you more confident of yourself.
8. When there are disturbing events, try to identify what is so disturbing about it? Could it be that you have been looking for more external approval than on how you truly felt? If so it may be more a case of hurt pride than any genuine reason for you to be angry or hurt.

9. Set clear goals for yourself for all areas of your life – personal, professional, health or spiritual. Write down what you would like to achieve and where you see yourself one year from now, two, five and ten years from now. Tell yourself that you deserve to achieve these goals and that you have the ability to achieve them.
10. When you write down your goals, for each one of them, write down smaller sub goals. Create a calendar containing reasonable deadlines for reaching each one of these. As you complete these smaller goals, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you are getting closer to achieving your goals and at the same time feel more confident of doing so.
11. If you are feeling afraid, identify your fears and then try to confront them. Visualizing yourself as overcoming your fears will make you overcome your uneasiness and make you more confident.
12. You can feel confident when you know both your strengths and your weaknesses. Knowing your weakness will quickly tell you when it is time to seek help from others.
13. Try to stay optimistic and positive whatever the situation. While it is true that you will be facing some very tough challenges in life, the only way you can truly face them is by staying positive. When you are facing a tough situation, the best option is to see how you can tackle it or make it better rather than complaining endlessly about it.
14. Many people think of optimism as a state of denial. However, that is not true. Staying positive and optimistic implies being aware of what the circumstances are and taking steps, importantly, positive, proactive steps to find solutions.
15. Identify and overcome your feelings of jealousy. Do not let jealousy cloud your judgment. Learn from the success of others to plan your own.
16. Practice being assertive. You have to learn to stand up and protect your self-respect. Even if you have made a mistake, you do not have to take unconstructive negative criticism from anyone.
17. However great the pressure, learn to say no when you think necessary. Rather than compromise on your values, you should be assertive and protect them. You will feel proud of yourself and your self-confidence will be strengthened.
18. You have unique abilities and talents that will bring you success in ways different from others. Learn to accept compliments and your success without any justification.
19. It is very important that you exercise regularly. Exercise will make you feel better about yourself and will of course bring you obvious physical benefits. Take up an activity that you enjoy and more importantly that you feel you will be able to take

up regularly. Do not take up something very ambitious - start small. Just walking or running in the morning should also do you good. If you do not feel motivated enough when you do it alone, try to go out with a friend.

20. Even when you are feeling emotionally disturbed, one of the best things you could do is find emotional release in a manner that you find satisfying. Some find going for a quick jog relaxing while others prefer to relax with music.
21. A healthy body needs a healthy mind. Take time off to meditate or reflect in solitude. Do so for at least fifteen minutes a day. Practicing meditation accompanied by deep breathing will also help you manage your emotions better.
22. Adequate sleep is very important to our overall well-being. Make sure that you take steps to ensure you get your quota of sleep every night. Do not eat too much or watch disturbing news or read a disturbing novel just before you go to sleep. Read inspirational novels, affirmations or pleasant stories before you go to bed. If you wake up feeling refreshed, you will naturally feel more confident about yourself.
23. Learn to have fun at what you are doing. While this may not be possible in every situation, most of the times, there is a sense of dreariness to whatever we do. Try to think of ways in which you can do what you are doing and still have fun.
24. Have a sense of humor. While again, this may not be possible at all times, having a sense of humor will allow you to look at your mistakes differently, making you more capable of quickly acknowledging them and trying to rectify them.
25. Be aware of your negative emotions. As and when you start experiencing negative emotions, take steps to bring them under control and as soon as you can seek release for them. Keeping them pent up inside of you is not healthy and may lead to more problems for your self and for those around you. Being able to quickly identify your emotions and actually manage them well, will only help build your self-esteem.
26. Take care of your relationships. Understand that you need to treat others the way you would like to be treated, with respect and understanding. Instead of saying something hurtful that you may regret later on, learn to take a pause, calm down and return to finish the conversation.
27. Start making time for yourself, your family and your friends. Spend more time with your children. Take your partner out for a romantic dinner or a romantic weekend getaway. Rediscover old friends. Being in nurturing relationships will help you feel better about yourself and help you regain your self-esteem.
28. Mere physical exercise is not enough to have a healthy body. Eat healthy balanced foods and go for your regular check-ups. Knowing that you are healthy and physically fit will make you more positive about the future.

29. Whenever you fear negative thoughts entering your mind, turn to more pleasant thoughts. Think of times when you were happy and at peace, maybe times of success. Try to recreate the scene in your mind and you will feel much calmer. While constructive criticism can be helpful, try to stay away from overly negative people. Stay close to people who are positive, supportive and encouraging of you.
30. Do not try to aim for perfectionism. It is an unattainable goal and will only help you feel frustrated and lower your self-esteem when you are not able to reach your perfect goal. Try to always do the best you can.
31. As part of your overall goal strategy, keep small goals for everyday. It could be as simple as looking up some information or picking up the phone and speaking to a friend who you have not spoken to in years. Do something everyday that will give you a sense of fulfillment and improve your self-esteem.
32. When you are feeling down, try and spend some time in nature. Take natural walks, watch some birds, admire the flowers or just walk on the grass bare feet. Whatever you do, spend your time really being one with nature. You cannot but be influenced by the beauty of it and you will feel your spirits rising.
33. Start a new hobby or if you already have one but have not done anything about it for ages, make some time for it. Having a hobby is a good way of releasing stress and negative emotions at the end of a long day. Learning a new hobby also brings with it the same benefits but in addition you also have a sense of accomplishment when you manage to learn something.
34. Keep a diary in which you will note down all that happened in the day; particularly those events that made you feel proud. Mention which specific talents or abilities of yours helped you achieve that. This will not only bolster your self-confidence tremendously but whenever you are having any kind of self-doubts, you will be able to read back these passages and tell yourself, that you are indeed capable of achieving many things.
35. Learn to praise yourself even for what may be small achievements for you and learn to accept compliments. Write down exactly what you did right in your diary along with the specific compliments that you received. These can inspire you and motivate you to do more, especially when you are feeling a little down.
36. When you have achieved any goal or a target, treat yourself. Encourage yourself to do more and decide to treat yourself better when you make even more significant progress. For example, treat yourself to a nice dinner every time you do well in your community college and promise yourself a vacation when you actually get the degree.

37. It is best to forgive those who have erred against you rather than carrying on a grudge forever. This is not only mentally stressful but has been shown to have an adverse impact on the physical health as well. Giving up on past grudges and forgiving others will make you feel a lot better, your mind will feel lighter and you will be able to look forward to the future with greater optimism.
38. Learn to forgive yourself. Do not be burdened by thoughts of guilt and regret. Though what you did may have consequences for others, it is best that you take responsibility, accept your mistake as a mistake and quickly try to figure out how to rectify matters. Accepting your mistake does not make you a weak person, on the contrary, you are a brave person and others will see you as such.
39. Do not try to deny your emotions, however uncomfortable they are. Many a times, some situations are so painful, that you may be overcome by strong emotions. Denying these emotions will only lead to greater resentment and may eventually explode in unwanted ways at unexpected times. If you feel the emotions you are feeling are too strong for you to overcome alone, take the help of a friend or professional help. Gaining control over your emotions particularly strong ones is very important for you to have a positive self-esteem.
40. You should stop all kinds of negative thoughts that go through your mind, particularly the critical ones. Keep reading or repeating your affirmations to yourself so that your mind starts thinking only positive thoughts.
41. Do not be afraid of getting into a new situation, whether it is professional like a new job or personal, like a new relationship. Your anxiety may make you shrink away from these for fear of failure. However, that is always self-fulfilling. Try to stay positive and determined to be so even if you fail.
42. You may wish to change some aspects of your life but may be thinking that there is very little you can do at this late stage. However, you should understand clearly that if you would like any changes in your life, you could achieve them at any stage.
43. Simply desiring change is not enough – one has to find a balance between wanting change that is realistic and change that is challenging. If you set too high a goal, you may not be able to reach it and may end up feeling even worse about yourself. On the other hand, setting very simple goals may not bring about the change that you are looking for. Set goals that are fairly challenging but which you are convinced you should be able to achieve.
44. Never be afraid of making mistakes. This fear will always make you uncertain and indecisive, making you lose your self-confidence. Always be quick to own up to your mistakes and take them as an opportunity to learn and grow.

45. Even if you have made mistakes, remember that nobody has the right to make negative or unconstructive criticism of you, including yourself. Do not put yourself down or allow anyone else to do so – stand up to others firmly but politely.
46. Every success that you achieve is important – whether others consider it big or small should not matter to you. You should value every one of your successes – there is nothing more powerful to boost your self-confidence than that.
47. When you gain praise from others or feel satisfied about an achievement of yours, do not look at it doubtfully. Everyone is capable of success and you should understand that you deserve yours.
48. At times, spending all your time in the hustle and bustle of life can drain your spirit. It helps to rejuvenate it by taking some time for yourself – by spending some time alone. You can do anything that will help bring inner peace – may it be meditation or listening to music. Find that one thing that will bring you solace so that you can face life with renewed vigor.
49. The monotony of life at times can really break your spirit at times and dent your self-confidence. Take some time to bring in change – play with your children or go away with your partner for a weekend. Surprise yourself with a break and you will find yourself feeling a lot better and a lot more confident.
50. You should also plan on longer holidays. Be specific about where you would like to go and enjoy planning for them. This will help you keep your spirits and confidence level up. Make a list of things that you would like to do in your holiday. Taking a well-deserved vacation and coming back feeling rested will make you feel much better about yourself.
51. Do not carry any emotional baggage that you can let go of. Many a times our past experiences, especially as children have a deep bearing on how we feel now. It is possible that as a child, someone made fun of you because of your height or background. Despite overcoming all that, there may be times when you feel a sense of shame and you are not sure where it is coming from. If you are able to identify what triggers it, learn to put it behind you. If you cannot, seek professional help so that you can grow as a person and boost your self-esteem.
52. If someone has offended you or hurt you in an intentional manner, you may be carrying a strong grudge inside you. However, carrying this grudge inside you for too long is only going to make matters worse. You are going to be constantly bitter and that is going to take a toll not only on your emotional health but also your physical well-being. If you let go of past grudges, you will find yourself feeling a lot more confident of yourself.

53. Never take anything for granted – not even your close family and friends. Always be grateful for what you have. When you start taking things for granted, the slightest inconvenience is blown out of proportion and you perceive insults where there are none. This can really bring down your self-esteem. On the other hand, being grateful and appreciative of what you have will make you more confident of what you have been able to achieve and others will respect you more for showing this appreciation.
54. Do not provide immediate reactions to any situation or person. If something has happened or someone has said something to anger you, respond with assertiveness not aggression. The best thing would be to take time to calm down and then react in a more controlled manner. This will boost your confidence in your ability to handle even the most tense situations.
55. Planning and preparing for the future is a positive sign while simply worrying about it will only leave you permanently concerned.
56. Understand that the most precious commodity you have with you is time. If you waste the present moment in fruitless pursuits or unnecessary worry, you are losing something irretrievable. Later you will come to regret all the time you had wasted and will feel very disappointed on having done so. This will cause further damage to your self-esteem.
57. Being constantly active and making full use of all your time in the pursuit of positive things will help keep you in a cheerful frame of mind and boost your self-esteem.
58. If there are any incidents in your past that have caused you any trauma, you need to take steps to heal them. You may be able to do this with the help of your family and friends or you may need professional help. Whichever way you choose, you need to come to terms with your trauma and start the healing process. Your emotional health will improve and you will feel more self-confident.
59. You need to first and foremost take responsibility for the way your life is today and where it is heading. While others may have had anywhere from a small to a large role to play in shaping it, it is finally your responsibility to let run the way it has been or to do something positive about it.
60. Look for a good role model. Understand what has made them so successful and so self-confident and learn from that.
61. Treat your failures as stepping-stones and dwell more on your achievements, to derive positive thoughts from them.
62. Take steps to feel good about yourself – groom yourself well, buy some new clothes, visit the parlor to give yourself a complete makeover.

63. Act very confidently and assertively – you will see some immediate results. You will feel far more confident right away.
64. Do not focus too much on aspects or abilities that you lack. You may not have the ability to engage a group or make them laugh but you may be a very sincere and loyal friend who sticks by others. Focus on these attributes.
65. Being well prepared is half the job done, they say. This is absolutely true. Being ill prepared only sets you up for failure and dents your confidence.
66. You should work continuously on improving your skills or acquiring new ones so that you never feel insecure in your job or any job that you may be looking for.
67. Have a bunch of relaxation exercises ready to work on when you are feeling particularly stressed.
68. Always stand straight and walk straight. This will make you look and feel more confident.
69. Break up each one of your main goals into small, more easily reachable goals. When you achieve this goal (no matter how small), it will be a task off your calendar and you will feel more confident having achieved something.
70. Life is not a race meant to decide a winner and a loser. Compare your achievements with your own in the past and not others. Your self-confidence depends on your needs and abilities.
71. Change your diet – try eating more fresh and balanced diets. You will not only find yourself feeling much better physically, you will feel more refreshed in the mind.
72. Make sure you are getting enough rest and recreations. Without these two, it will be difficult for you to be at your peak when you are trying to achieve something.
73. Fix yourself up to feel good – like fixing your teeth for example. If you look good, you will even feel good.
74. Take some grooming tips and change your style to reflect the ideas today.
75. If you buy a wardrobe in keeping with the trends and colors of the day, you will find yourself feeling much better about yourself not to mention getting admiration from friends, family and colleagues.
76. Many people nowadays are treating eyeglasses as another fashion accessory. If you feel your glasses are making you look old, outdated and are lowering your self-esteem, go in for a new pair of stylish, branded eyeglasses or think of contact lenses.

77. Whenever you start comparing yourself with others, stop immediately, take a step back and think of all the wonderful things in your life.
78. Write down your set of priorities – your immediate requirements. Writing them down and sticking to them will give you great satisfaction.
79. The New Year need not be the only time you make resolutions. Anytime you are feeling low on confidence, make a resolution to achieve or do one of the things that will bring you maximum satisfaction.
80. Consider changing your job if it is not giving you satisfaction and you do not enjoy doing what you do. Explore all possibilities and if you feel strongly you do not like your current job, find another one.
81. Make your future financially secure – one of the best ways of boosting your self-esteem, it is very important that you save well and invest wisely so that your future is secure. If you need help, go to a professional financial advisor.
82. When you can spare the time, make a brief list of habits you would like to stop and habits you would like to instill in you. Make the list and start from now.
83. Do not collect anything and everything for the sake of sentiment. You will only find yourself feeling collecting an endless amount of stuff – whether it be an old subscription that you have not let go off or old photos, get rid of them at the earliest opportunity.
84. Plan for a trip to some really exotic or adventurous trip. Instead of going to standard tourist spots, go explore places on your own. You will be given a fresh perspective, which will influence your thinking.
85. While speaking, you should speak at a slow steady state that shows you are in control rather than speaking excitedly and not making any sense.
86. Running is one of the best ways to get your adrenalin pumping – it dispels all negative thoughts and your sense of physical fitness will also leave you feeling good about yourself.
87. Join a support group – you will meet people who have gone through or are going through similar issues and you will find a wonderful plethora of tips and advice that you can use to boost your self-esteem.

88. Join a professional games league like bowling to basketball. You will meet new friends and use your time constructively.
89. For a sense of achievement and to make life interesting, learn a new language.
90. Use practical methods to remember and relive good memories. Look at your football trophies, rerun your professional successes, and pull out pictures of happy days.
91. Music with some toe-tapping, heart-thumping rhythm can immediately fill you with energy.
92. Whenever you are feeling a little down, watch reruns of movies that make you feel happy and grateful about your life.
93. Talk to friends and family when your self-esteem is low – they are your biggest supporters and sympathizers. They will point to you what your positive and strong aspects and work tirelessly to rebuild your self-confidence.
94. Try to be authentic. Do not copy others – their looks, their ideas or their value system. The more original you are, the better respected you will be, boosting your self-esteem.
95. While speaking, make eye contact with others. Even when you made a mistake, learn to speak equally assertively.
96. Do not let a situation control you. Believe in your ability to bring about changes in the situation and behave accordingly.
97. Just as you would not want others to be critical of you, you should also learn to not be overly critical of others. Your success is not measured by the failures or the mistakes of others and your confidence will be seen in the measured way you react to failures of others. Be constructive and carry them with you to collectively achieve success.
98. Being self-confident is being open about everything in life. You need not be afraid of any secrets affecting your status.
99. Focus on solutions rather than your problems. You have a weight problem – instead of worrying about it, see what small steps you can take towards finding a solution for it.

100. Finish something that you have been putting off for a long time however hard it may be – perhaps a phone call to a family member you are angry with or just the cleaning of the attic. Finishing these up will give you a sense of fulfillment.
101. Empower yourself with knowledge about what you can do to improve your self-confidence. Research more, and read more – from books, websites, magazines and educational institutions.