Self-esteem

The way we view and feel about ourselves has a profound effect on how we live our lives. These opinions are shaped by our past experiences and the culture in which we live.

The background

For many of us, self-esteem can feel conditional and linked to our achievements, or acceptance by others. Conversely, success can seem like a great ego booster, and academic achievement like an obvious sign of success. However, living in an environment where there is a wealth of talent and overt competition can challenge the views that people hold of themselves. You may feel that your ability is over-estimated. Students can feel under pressure to do well for the sake of their family, communities, college etc.

However, what we feel about ourselves is not based solely on what we do. It usually involves our relationships with others and whether we feel worthwhile as people. We have a basic human need to be wanted, noticed, and included. Many of us want to contribute, to be of value, and make a difference – in other words, to matter.

Our self-esteem can fluctuate and be affected by events and encounters with other people. Many of us are constantly judging and evaluating ourselves, often in comparison with others

Suggestions for improving self-esteem

Change is not easy. It means stepping into the unknown and taking a risk. Inevitably this means that some initiatives will work well while others don't work out as hoped. You can help yourself by being realistic in your choices and seeing each success as a step in the right direction. Remember that even small changes add up.

Try to do things for pleasure, for fun

- Think about ways in which you can enjoy yourself. Put effort into making life pleasurable and satisfying.

- Perhaps learn something new. Maybe something you have always wanted to try, even something you never thought you could do.

- Maybe make time to volunteer for something that you feel passionately about, and that connects you with the local or wider community.

Look after yourself physically

- Try to eat regularly and think about the sort of food you eat.

- Try to get the amount of sleep you need and establish a routine that works for you.

- Exercise can help to feel more confident and to connect with your body. Try to pay attention to how you stand and walk.

Use rewards, but avoid punishments

- Reward yourself in different ways. How about giving yourself one day off from studying/working late a week? Can you buy yourself a little treat? Or do something you particularly enjoy but don't often get round to.

- Listen to your internal dialogue. Can you try to be kinder and more compassionate to yourself?

Cultivate good relationships - with yourself and others

- Can you bear to be ordinary? Are you continually expecting more of yourself than you do of others? If you accept the troubles, mistakes and variability of other people, how about being happy with 'good enough' in relation to yourself?

- Take care not to push other people away through being negative about yourself.

- Join in with others. Be proactive in making and maintaining contact with others.

Take responsibility

- It is no good waiting for others or circumstances to leave you feeling better about yourself. Accept responsibility for your own actions - you cannot make other people change, but you can make the changes yourself.