

Self Esteem & Self Love

Loving yourself, which means taking good care of yourself, is essential for healthy relationships and mental well-being in general. We cannot give what we do not have. Where there is no healthy self-love there is little possibility of healthily loving anyone else. That is why self-love and self-esteem are so fundamental to a healthy life and enjoying well functioning relationships.

Self-esteem refers to the way we perceive our self; how we relate to our self. Self-love refers to the way we show kindness, compassion and respect for who and what we are. Most people are challenged by their self image at some time in their lives but many experience chronic low self esteem, which may give rise to the following problems:

Difficulty expressing themselves

Good communication is essential for successful relationships. People with low self-esteem have difficulty expressing what they genuinely think and feel. They hide their real feelings because they believe, usually unconsciously, that if they are seen for who they truly are they will be disliked and rejected. Inside they feel unworthy and believe others will see them as they see themselves. So they wear a mask to win the approval of others, but in doing so they are not being true to themselves. Not representing their real self creates inner turmoil, emotional disturbance and identity problems. Relating through a deceptive mask confuses the mind, which becomes easily hurt, angry and defensive. Being prone to emotional suffering makes us shut down, isolate and suffer inner loneliness.

Trust issues

Trust is fundamental to healthy relationships. People with low self-esteem lack confidence and they struggle to trust themselves and others. If we lack trust in ourselves and others there is no one to depend upon, and this leads to everpresent uncertainty and insecurity. Trust creates a sense of comfort and consistency upon which we build the interdependency that is essential to healthy relating. A life without trust in self and others leads to a tendency to withdraw from relationship; and when relating to stay distant and safe from the fear of rejection and loss.

Negative and pessimistic

People with low self-esteem suffer from a negative outlook. They are prone to self-pity, looking down on themselves and feeling like a victim. They have a poor view of their life and so relating, especially intimately, is a constant struggle with the anxiety that they are not good enough. For example, they may always be asking their partners if they look good. If the answer is yes, they will nonetheless secretly disbelieve the compliment and continue to feel that they don't look good. Those who lack self-respect are not able to feel admired, and feel generally unloved by others. Feeling unloved is a chronic pain in the heart and soul, which often manifests in physical illness along with mental health problems.

Self destructive

Persons with low self-worth attract those who don't treat them well or respectfully. They unconsciously enter difficult relationships because they believe deep inside that they do not deserve to be happy. 'Why would anyone love me and treat me well if I'm such a bad and unworthy person'? It is not uncommon for those suffering low self-esteem to impulsively enter into self-destructive relationships.

Not functioning well

People with low self-esteem are consciously, or unconsciously, passive and pessimistic. They don't know how to maintain a wholesome relationship because they have an unwholesome opinion of themselves. This makes them prone to being abused and manipulated by other people. Partners who can healthily love and respect themselves can healthily love each other too. Low self-esteem means being stuck in the misery of unfulfilled needs that cannot be met by others. In relationships where both partners suffer low self-esteem they both end up feeling disappointed. Worse still they live in unending conflicts, resentments and unhealed wounds that fester in mutual misery.

Unhealthy expectations

Persons with low self-esteem are very needy. This is because they don't know how to nourish their own needs, and so look to others to feed their hunger for love. They yearn for emotional nourishment to fill the starving void of loneliness they feel. But others cannot fill it. For example, they enter intimate, highly charged relationships expecting their inner pain will be healed, but it doesn't turn out like that. At first, they will flatter each other to make their partner feel admired, because that is what they want and expect for themselves. If their partner does

not satisfy their inner craving they will feel disappointed, which creates conflict between the partners. It is this cycle of pursuing need-driven love from someone else that leads to chronic disappointment and conflict. Healthy love is not need driven but the expression of compassion, kindness and empathy to oneself and ones partner equally.

Problems managing conflicts

People with low self-esteem have poor conflict management skills. They have difficulties resolving the normal problems of intimate relationship, which makes their inevitable conflicts more difficult to resolve. And when they begin to feel the stress of conflicts they become aggressive or isolate themselves, making it impossible to get anything settled. This behaviour often leads to addictions, obsessions and high levels of anxiety. As a result their relationships become trapped in unresolvable conflicts that deepen and become more toxic with time.

Over critical of others

People with low self-esteem may be irritating because they are unreasonably critical of other people. Their unreasonable self-criticism means they will be critical of everyone else too. Most often they hide their criticism of others for fear of being negatively judged. Inside, however, they live with a deep sense that other people are not good enough, which mirrors how they feel about themselves. Sufferers of low self-esteem may appear sweet on the outside but their sugar coating hides a bitter inner core. In extreme cases self-hatred is the mother of misanthropy, the hatred of human beings.

They might ruin you

Helpers and compulsive rescuers beware: you may be attracted to those suffering low self esteem because you think you can fix things for them, or you could heal the wounds of their past. But past hurts began in childhood and so cannot be fixed by others. If you constantly get hurt by a partner with low self esteem and you move away it doesn't mean you are selfish, but that you are caring for and supporting yourself. That is self-love and self esteem in action.

On a Positive Note

Despite the difficulties of suffering from low self esteem and a lack of self love we can learn to manage our problems and enjoy a full and happy life. But work is

required. We must get to know ourselves and our habits, and learn how to find care, compassion and kindness towards ourself in mind, body and spirit. This can be the most meaningful journey we ever undertake.