



Raise Your Self-Esteem to Live Your Extraordinary Life

Reprogram the Fears Holding You Back

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Workshop 5

SELF-ESTEEM

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Borrowed from: Pathways to Lasting Self-Esteem by Stanley J. Gross

We are Stuck Because of Low Self-Esteem...

Self-esteem reflects a person's overall subjective emotional evaluation of his or her own worth. Low self-esteem is a negative evaluation of oneself. This type of evaluation usually occurs when some circumstance we encounter in our life touches on our sensitivities (triggers us).

Low self-esteem expresses itself in shame-attacks, self-doubt, inadequacy, aggression, arrogance, and even denial that these exist! It increases vulnerability to emotional distress, anxiety, depression, stress and addiction.

The less-than-perfect-caretaking (LTPC) we received growing up lays the basis for low self-esteem... Even with minor LTPC, children who are not allowed to, or can't, talk about their experience interpret negative events as their fault. The result is thinking and feeling they are wrong, bad/not good enough or unwanted... These beliefs are stored in the subconscious and the related pain in the unconscious.

These beliefs and feelings are responsible for a life-long habit of avoiding the fear that comes up in the face of negatively perceived events...

Remember, the only reality is THIS MOMENT (now, now, now).

Fear is a projection, an attempt to avoid perceived future pain – which doesn't exist!

Notice - all is well in this moment... And then in the next, and the next...

Fear avoidance is the active ingredient in maintaining low self-esteem as it prevents us from learning about ourselves and from having a healthy range of response options available to us.

When a “negative event” happens, we personalize the incident and experience physical, emotional, and cognitive arousal. This is so alarming and confusing that we respond with self-destructive responses (with our defense mechanisms). Our actions tend to be automatic and impulse-driven, we feel upset or emotionally blocked, our thinking narrows, our self-care deteriorates, we lose our sense of self, we focus on being in control, and become self-absorbed. This perpetuates self-defeating cycles reinforcing the low-esteem.

Low Self-Esteem Characteristics:

- ◇ Automatic and impulse-driven actions – include substance abuse and compulsive habits with self-destructive results or blocked action (this is one of the reasons that people tend to be behind their peer group...)
- ◇ Control needs – lead to self-defeating, manipulative, submissive and dominating action
- ◇ Emotional uncertainty – where lack of self knowledge results in disruptive or blocked feelings (disrupts ability to be intimate)
- ◇ Black and white, self-absorbed, worried and other distorted thinking – where either/or considerations, and other distortions, restrict options and choice, or blocking of new information happens
- ◇ Enmeshed or distant relationships – foster abuse, people pleasing, lose of self and poor self-care

This tendency is a *coping impulse trance*, an automatic response to fearful incidents that impacts our ability to learn and develop better skills to respond to stressful situations in our lives. Facing our fears slows down the trance and allows us to learn the skills necessary for increased self-esteem and better life.

5 Fluid Levels of Fear (Evolution...)

I. Status Quo. We abuse ourselves via addiction to substances or dependence on compulsive habits: Codependency, sex/love, spending, eating, gambling, work, rage... We are impulsive, negative, and look outside ourselves for things to change... **The challenge here is that addictions and dependencies block awareness of fear and absorb energy to change...** Deciding change is desired and getting support helps get the ball rolling.



- II. Contain impulse and destructive habits via boundary setting, self-care, distraction and support. *Here we face the fear of substituting self-care for the addictive substance or habit.* **“Cravings/hooks/bait” might increase short term becoming the challenge at this level, and we might experience both wanting to contain our habits as well as being seduced back to them.** Admitting our role in the problem and developing a plan of action helps with the self-containment.
- III. Implement a self-care practice to create a success prophecy and validate positive self-esteem. By adopting self-affirming actions helps the “cravings/hooks/baits” become a less common experience. *Here we face the fear of falling back on old habits.* **Figuring out how to maintain self-caring activities is the challenge at this level.** Creating systems, routines and structures and utilizing an *Accountability/Support Buddy* helps stay the course and course correct as necessary.
- IV. Slow automatic responses and stimulate effective action by noticing, acknowledging and addressing negative beliefs and impulsive acts. *Here we tackle our impulsive personalizing of perceived negative events – we see how impulses block our ability to face our fear of confusion, stress, and change.* **Addressing the negative beliefs and wounds at the core of our over reactions is the challenge at this level.** Becoming aware of the consequences of our choices, we learn about ourselves, regardless of the success of our actions. Addressing distorted thinking and negative beliefs help change our lens and open up response options to appropriately meeting our needs.
- V. Open the door to self-forgiveness and positive self-esteem by facing resentment over the traumas of childhood. Here we exchange our negative and pessimistic view for one that is more positive and affirming, we grieve over the loss of childhood, and we own our magnificence. This gives us a heightened access to our internal resources and allows us to deal effectively with life’s dilemmas and opportunities. *At this level we face the fear of being our authentic self and of success.* **The challenge at this level is to address the connection between the impact of the less-than-perfect-caretaking (LTPC) and our erroneous negative core beliefs.** A sustained process of facing our fears creates success.

The Low Self-Esteem Cul-de-Sac

Our relationship provides an opportunity for healing and growth with its inherent ability to replicate patterns and provide challenges, but life in and of itself provides plenty of opportunities for growth.

We grow emotionally by meeting life’s daily challenges... We grow chronologically as time passes, but it is in the meeting of challenges, dilemmas and opportunities that we grow in physical, intellectual and emotional functioning. The extent to which we take advantage of these opportunities makes all the difference.

Often these can be confusing and uncomfortable. **When we do not have needed coping skills and emotional support, we may become so fearful that we see these challenges as threats to our integrity and sense of self.** These threats may produce fears about personal loss, our lack of ability, or our inadequacy. When we face these fears, we open up the possibility of learning about them and ourselves. Therefore increasing our self-knowledge and our self-esteem. If we avoid facing these fears, we sidestep this learning and maintain our low self-esteem.

By slowing down the process of reaction we are able to see its parts and begin to understand how to change...

1. Certain social demand or new experience – if familiar and we believe we have the skills and internal resources the situation translates to excitement, but we often don't have the resources
2. Situation threatens personal safety – lack of resources creates dilemma which makes us feel uncomfortable because they threaten our feeling of safety
3. Situation is unfamiliar or confusing – when we feel threatened we become confused... which leads to feeling fear
4. We personalize the situation – we believe we don't know how to deal with the challenge and we fear our integrity, self, will be compromised. The meaning we give the situation creates a sense of vulnerability (triggers are wounds of being wrong, bad/not good enough, unwanted). By personalizing we muster our defenses against the attack..., and respond with our “defense mechanisms”...
5. Coping impulse – our response comes in the form of the trance... It follows a pattern... It is automatic. As a habit, we are unaware of its role in protecting us from the threat. It characteristics include:
 - a. Perception = Distorted
 - b. Meaning = Lose integrity/Self
 - c. Feeling rule = Don't
 - d. Coping style = Blame, placate, intellectualize, or distract
 - e. Talking rule = Don't
6. Impulsive action – act to control some aspect of our environment or our reaction to it in order to avoid the fear... This may involve swallowing our feelings, raging explosively, or resorting to an addiction / habit to block our feelings. They have adaptive value – they protect us...
7. Effect of action – in attempting to control we lose control... Our actions are usually self-defeating or self-destructive. When the arousal passes, we may regret the action but don't believe we could have avoided it.
8. Shame – the experience confirms/reinforces our low self-esteem... (low self worth...)





Low Self-Esteem & Codependency

Mutual reliance is a desirable aspect of intimacy, but codependency actually blocks intimacy... Ignoring our own needs in favor of the needs of others, masks fear and is not an expression of love. **By trying to gain support, validity, protection, and/or control we can actually lose ourselves.**

In codependency, our lack of knowledge about our own needs has us acting in some of the following ways (think about personal ownership circles):

- ◇ We lack clarity about our boundaries - we permit abuse and refrain from self-care
- ◇ We give our power away - we feel helpless
 - by pleasing others, not ourselves
 - by making what others think too important - looking to others to know what we need and how to act
- ◇ We believe that others will meet our needs if we meet theirs - we become resentful when they don't
- ◇ We need others to make us feel whole - we stay in an unfit relationship
- ◇ We expect that others will see the world as we do - we do not understand that they have wants and needs which are different from ours
- ◇ Hear only information about ourselves - we become self-absorbed

When our close relations do not live up to our codependent expectations, **our negative beliefs about ourselves are verified...** We think we are wrong, bad/not good enough/inadequate, unwanted and to blame for whatever negative happened.

Since this is hard to accept, **we deny the blame (avoid the fear) by placating, manipulating, or resenting these close relations.** At the same time, we are willing to do anything to avoid rejection by them. So we may enable them in their addictions or abuse tolerating inappropriate behavior to "keep the peace."

When we avoid our fears in this controlling and self-absorbed way, we distort our perception of events and circumstances to be entirely "about us." We have difficulty detaching from or having empathy for others. Enmeshed with others, we judge ourselves by their behavior toward us. Our over-concern about what others think about us has us projecting our anxieties onto them so that what we see is a reflection of our needs (our interpretation of the event highlights our needs). What we fear others will say about us is what we actually think about ourselves...

Increasing Self-Esteem and Creating Change...

We can provide for our own safety, engender hope, tolerate confusion, and raise self-esteem by learning and using basic essential life skills. When we conquer fear and have successes, we not only raise self-esteem but start creating the relationship and life we desire...

Life Skills

- ◇ **Detach and Self-Own.** End all abuse; say “no” to misrepresentations and assumptions. By maintaining personal boundaries, we discourage abuse by others and assert our separateness. It involves the ability to separate oneself emotionally from others. Detaching represents an ongoing recognition of the difference between “I” and “you”, the willingness and ability to say “no” when others intrude on our personal space, and recognizing our unique needs, which may differ from others.

Detaching from others requires:

 - » Appreciating that our experience of events differs from that of others’
 - » Accepting the differences
 - » Knowing our limits, maintaining them against self-abuse and abuse by others
 - » Knowing our own needs and acting responsibly to meet them by pleasing ourselves
 - » Maintaining clarity about how we are different from others and how they differ from us
 - » Undermining the power of projection (when people are talking about us, they are telling us about themselves; what we specially dislike about others, we fear in ourselves)
 - » Valuing learning over perfection
 - » Understanding that we all make a contribution to all the situations in which we are involved

Do boundary work and take ownership of your self...
- ◇ **Optimize Conscious Thinking and Subconscious Beliefs.** End either/or and other dirty thinking - think in “shades of gray” and learn to reframe meanings. Clean up self-sabotaging beliefs. Change your language and watch your “I Ams” – you create your reality with every “I Am.” These are messages to your subconscious mind... Use reprogramming tools to give different messages. These create a different lens creating new possibilities on how to approach our situation.
- ◇ **Experience and Address Feelings.** Painful experiences left unhealed are still stuck within you... The fastest way to heal is to speak the truth about them... Give them a voice so they can be released. Journal, talk, feel into them (crying is good), feel them in your body. Fully feel the emotions you haven’t allowed yourself to feel yet. Speak the truth about your shame, with compassion and forgiveness for yourself - this sets you free... Translate vulnerable feelings into needs.
- ◇ **Take Assertive Actions.** Voice what you see, feel, need and want by using “I” statements. By expressing our thoughts, feelings, and desires in a direct and honest manner, we show that we are in charge of our lives. Assertive actions connect our internal experience to actions congruent with our thinking and feeling allowing us to appropriately meet our needs, respond to that of others, take care of the business of life and create the life we want. Contrary to popular



belief, angry outbursts, the abuse of power and the domination of others are not assertive actions. It does not mean asserting ourselves at the expense of others!

Assertion requires learning skills such as:

- » Expressing oneself in an emotionally honest way, directly revealing ownership of our own feelings and needs when deemed appropriate through the use of first “I Statements
- » Being clear about one’s connection with and detachment from others
- » Not compromising one’s own dignity or integrity or that of others
- » Taking the feelings of others into account, and let them know they are heard
- » Being able to deal with compliments or criticisms as pleasing or useful information; and being open to feedback and learning.
- » Accepting the reality of our vulnerability, our need to maintain boundaries, and to know ourselves
- » Knowing and accepting that people have different ways of satisfying their needs
- » Understanding that differences and conflict between people are inevitable and that compromise is necessary
- » Having listening, problem-solving, and mediation skills. Meeting our own needs without resorting to manipulation, domination or denying the needs of others.

Assertive acts provide a sense of being “in charge” of one’s own life, positive self-esteem, reduced anxiety, and more fulfilling relationships. Assertiveness is an expression of self-control:

- » It involves knowing what we want, believing in our right to want it, and finding a way to get it without requiring that we always have our way.
- » Likewise, when we do not want something, we can say “no,” protect ourselves, and detach from over involvement in the situation.

Most of us live in a context in which other’s needs may conflict or compete with our own. **While it is important to assert ourselves and maintain our personal boundaries, we also need to find ways to blend these actions with respect for others. Detachment/ownership and receptivity skills are crucial in this regard, as they permit us to separate ourselves emotionally to put ourselves in another person’s shoes.**

Work on appropriately and mindfully meeting your needs, setting and achieving goals, setting up structures and routines.

♦ **Receptivity & Connection/Intimacy.** End self-absorption; listen to others’ words and meanings to restate them. In this way, we act with awareness of our contribution to events as well as empathize with the needs of others. This involves the ability to view the situation from the vantage point of another person...

To do so we detach ourselves momentarily from our own needs and listen carefully to what the other person says (and does not say). We observe relevant body language and other cues. When we listen so well that we can report back to the speaker the sense of what they said or meant without interpretation or distortion we are demonstrating we get them. We show we understand where the other person is “coming from.” When we share such understanding the other person feels heard, respected and valued. Establish connecting routines and rituals, and systematize / calendarize staying in touch, dates / couple time and fun.

Break the Stuckness...

Identify the trigger

We personalize stressful events (e.g., criticism) by inferring a negative meaning about ourselves. A self-defeating action often follows. Each event can be a chance to learn about ourselves if we face our fear of doing so, and the negative beliefs about ourselves that sustain the negative meanings.

Slow down personalizing

Trump personalizing to slow impulsive responses. You can begin to interfere with these automatic overreactions by using relaxation and stress management techniques. These techniques are directed at self-soothing the arousal. This allows us to interrupt the otherwise inevitable automatic reaction and put into play a way to begin to face the unacknowledged driving fears.

Stop and take notice

Pay attention to the familiarity of the impulse. Our tendency is to overreact in the same way to the same incident. Awareness of the similarity can be the way to slow our reactivity.

Acknowledge the reaction

Verbalize, "Here I go again (describe action, feeling, thought)..." Actively do something with the awareness rather than passively note it. This slows the impulse and gives us a choice about how we want to respond.

Choose a response

Hold self-defeating impulses. Act in a self-caring and effective way. By choosing to act in a more functional way, we take a step toward facing our fears.

Accept the impulse

Be able to state the benefit (e.g., protection) of overreaction. We won't be able to do this at first, but as we become more effective, we will begin to appreciate what our self-defeating impulse had been doing for us. And, we can take pride in doing this in a more healthy way.

Implement an ongoing self-care, self-growth and nurturing practice

Make new lifestyle choices by joining self-help groups and practicing positive health care. Use boundaries, systems, routines and structures to assist you sustain this.

BONUS

Evidence of progress

1. Greater emotional distance (like being at the bottom of the ocean) from stressful circumstances (while waves at surging the top of the ocean)
2. Clarity about feelings
3. Increased toleration for confusion
4. Increased self-caring action
5. Decreased aggression or submission
6. Reduced self-absorption and increased connection/intimacy

Stages of Change

- I. Unaware of need to change
- II. Acknowledge need to change
- III. Accept need to change
- IV. Prepare to change
- V. Take action
- VI. Maintain the action
- VII. Action integrated into lifestyle
- VIII. *Relapse* (the personal consequences of not changing can trigger a return to the new action)

Generate Your Own Hope

1. Set clear goals relevant to your Fear Level and your pertinent Life Skill
2. Accept losses and limits
3. Examine resources
4. Think “can do”
 - a. Concentrate on small steps
 - b. Prioritize steps
 - c. Rehearse action
 - d. Tolerate errors and set backs
 - e. Normalize barriers / plan around them
 - f. Reduce risks
 - g. Act “as if”
5. Assess & Recalibrate



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