

instant help solutions

self-esteem for teens

**six principles for
creating the life you want**



LISA M. SCHAB, LCSW

Contents

Contents

read this first: How Self-Esteem Can Work for You

What Is Healthy Self-Esteem?

Why You Want Healthy Self-Esteem

School

Friends

Dating

Work

Family

How This Book Can Help You Develop Healthy Self-Esteem

part 1: core beliefs

The Town Up Ahead

principle 1: My Self-Esteem Is in My Hands

Your Self-Esteem Comes from Your Thoughts

Where Our Thoughts About Ourselves Come From

Brain Biology

Learn

Explore

Become

Formal mindfulness

Informal mindfulness

Affirm

Family Messages

Learn

Explore

Become

Affirm

Social Messages

Learn

Explore

Become

Affirm

Self-Messages

Learn

Explore

Become

Affirm

The Queen's Garden

principle 2: Every Human Being Has Intrinsic Value and Worth,
Including Me

The Truth About Human Worth

Thoughts That Prevent Us from Embracing This Truth

Differences

Learn

Explore

Become

Affirm

Mistakes

Learn

Explore

Become

Affirm

Judging

Learn

Explore

Become

Affirm

Looks

Learn

Explore

Become

Affirm

wisdom tale : Three Friends

principle 3: My Greatest Value, Potential, and Power Lie in My Authentic Self

Who Is Your Authentic Self?

Reasons We Reject Our Authentic Self

Expectations

Learn

Explore

Become

Affirm

Roles

Learn

Explore

Become

Affirm

“Greener Grass”

Learn

Explore

Become

Affirm

Accepting Our Journey

Learn

Explore

Become

Affirm

part 2: power-filled choices

The Wolf

principle 4: Feeding the Positive Grows the Positive

The Power of Attitude

Learn
Explore
Become
Affirm

The Power of Gratitude

Learn
Explore
Become
Affirm

The Power of Compassion

Learn
Explore
Become
Affirm

The Power of Assertiveness

Learn
Explore
Become
Affirm

The Butterfly

principle 5: There Is a Reward in Every Struggle

The Power of Managing Feelings

Learn
 Speaking
 Writing
 Movement
Explore
Become
Affirm

The Power of Tolerating Discomfort

Learn

Explore

Become

Affirm

The Power of Making Positive Decisions

Learn

Explore

Become

Affirm

The Power of Taking Responsibility

Learn

Explore

Become

Affirm

The Donkey

principle 6: I Am Not Limited by My Circumstances

The Power of Possibility

Learn

Explore

Become

Affirm

The Power of Conviction

Learn

Explore

Become

Affirm

The Power of Turning It Around

Learn

Explore

Become

Affirm

The Power of Inner Peace

Learn

Breathwork

Thoughts

Mindfulness meditation

Belief in a higher power

Acceptance

Explore

Become

Affirm

Ending Note

Acknowledgments

read this first

How Self-Esteem Can Work for You

We all want to feel good about ourselves. We want to wake up in the morning and believe we matter. We want to believe we're loved. We want to believe we have value.

Many of us go through life running after this feeling. We see it as something that might happen in the future—when we get something in particular we want, when someone in our life validates us, when we accomplish a certain goal, or when we finally have the right circumstances. We believe that when something changes, we will finally feel good about ourselves.

The problem with this belief is that it gives away our power. It makes us dependent on other people, certain circumstances, or the future for our happiness. It keeps us running after, but never catching, the good feeling about ourselves we're seeking.

The purpose of this book is to teach you these facts:

Your true power lies within you.

The ability to wake up in the morning and believe you matter, are loved, and have value is completely—and only—within your control.

It's only your mind that needs to change for you to feel good about yourself.

You can achieve that good feeling right now all by yourself.

That good feeling is called healthy self-esteem.

What Is Healthy Self-Esteem?

It's important to be clear on what healthy self-esteem really means. If you understand it, you'll realize how important it is, how it affects your entire life, and why putting energy and focus into its development is worth the effort.

Very basically, self-esteem is how you feel about yourself. If you want to feel authentically good about yourself, truthfully, down at the deepest level, you need healthy self-esteem.

People with healthy self-esteem generally have positive thoughts and feelings about themselves. They are certain enough of their equality with others that they can admit their faults without feeling ashamed and enjoy their strengths without putting others down.

People without healthy self-esteem generally have negative thoughts and feelings about themselves. They are not confident in their equality to others, so they feel ashamed when they make mistakes and may put others down in order to cover up their insecurity.

Madeline gets a poor grade on her English paper and tells herself she's stupid. She walks into a party and no one says hi to her, so she tells herself she's a loser. She applies for a job but doesn't get it and tells herself she didn't deserve it anyway. Madeline generally feels bad about herself. This is an example of unhealthy self-esteem.

Jacob gets a poor grade on his English paper and tells himself he needs to put in more effort next time. When he walks into a party and no one says hi to him, he goes over and says hi to someone himself. He applies for a job but doesn't get it and tells himself he'll try again with another job. Jacob generally feels good about himself. This is an example of healthy self-esteem.

When Sarah hits the winning run in the baseball game, she cheers her success and celebrates the team effort with her fellow players. She treats the coach to pizza and thanks her for her help during the season. She happily displays her trophy in her bedroom. Sarah generally feels good about herself, and her actions are examples of healthy self-esteem.

When Kevin hits the winning run in the baseball game, he cheers his success and talks about how the team couldn't have won without him. He tells the coach to buy him a pizza and name him Most Valuable Player as reward for the victory. He puts his trophy in his locker, showing everyone—but warning them not to touch it. From the outside, it may look as if Kevin feels good about himself, but on the inside he doesn't truly believe in his equality to others. To cover up his insecurity, he acts like he thinks he's really great. He actually needs to overact in order to convince himself. Kevin's actions are examples of unhealthy self-esteem.

Healthy self-esteem is a deep knowing that you are a valuable person and so is everyone else. When you have healthy self-esteem, you don't need to have someone else affirm you or to achieve a certain goal to feel good about yourself. You don't have to feel better than someone else to know you're okay. You know your self-worth doesn't depend on whether you win or lose.

Healthy self-esteem includes these characteristics:

- an overall positive regard for yourself
- an understanding and acceptance of your weaknesses
- a celebration of your strengths
- a realistic belief about your equality to others

Teens who have healthy self-esteem have these abilities:

- They know and accept themselves.
- They practice compassion for themselves and others.
- They act with integrity and self-discipline.
- They use healthy coping skills in their thoughts and actions to meet life challenges.
- They keep a conviction of their unconditional worth despite changing circumstances.
- They choose and stand by their own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, instead of giving in to pressure from others.
- They remain convinced of, and act with respect for, the worth of others.

Thoughts like these come from healthy self-esteem:

- I'll just keep trying until I get it.*
- I can tell she doesn't like me, but that's okay.*
- I love wearing this shirt even though it's not in style.*
- It's all right if we disagree.*
- I didn't win, but even placing is awesome.*

Thoughts like these come from unhealthy self-esteem:

- I have to make the team so I can prove I'm as good as them.*
- I feel so stupid when I make mistakes.*
- They're probably lying; it's hard to trust anyone.*

*I'm always second best.
I hate this school; everyone's conceited.*

Why You Want Healthy Self-Esteem

Your self-esteem is one of the greatest factors in how you'll experience every aspect of your life, because you bring it with you to every situation—classes, parties, dating relationships, job interviews, the family dinner table. When you bring healthy self-esteem, you have a better chance at success and happiness in everything you do.

School

Healthy self-esteem gives you the confidence to ask for help when you don't understand something in class. It lets you leave a party early to study for a test even if your friends want you to stay. It helps you bounce back after you get a low grade, because you know you're not a failure; you just need to work harder. It gives you the confidence to follow your interests and take steps to achieve your dreams when you think about college or career goals. Healthy self-esteem helps you focus on your achievements instead of your mistakes so that you can keep moving forward on your academic path.

Friends

Healthy self-esteem lets you feel good about yourself whether you're the life of the party or the quiet observer. It gives you the confidence to not attend a party if you just don't like crowds. It gives you the power to stand your ground if friends try to talk you into something that you really don't want to do or that you know will get you in trouble. It helps you relax and enjoy life just by being yourself, without having to use substances to have fun or feel comfortable. It helps you worry less about what you'll do, say, or wear, because your self-worth isn't dependent on what other people think. It allows you to develop true friendships based on authenticity and equality, instead of choosing relationships based on social status. It helps you know that your friends truly like the real you—because that's all you ever try to be.

Dating

Having healthy self-esteem in a dating relationship means you're able to compromise: both you and your partner share decision-making

equally. It means you're happy when you're with your partner but you also have independent interests; you're not dependent on being together for your happiness or identity. Healthy self-esteem in a relationship means you don't let your partner pressure you into behaviors you aren't ready for or interested in. It means you listen to and respect your partner and your partner listens to and respects you. There's a sense of balance and equality in a healthy dating relationship; both partners contribute equally—emotionally and physically—to the maintenance of the relationship.

Work

When you bring healthy self-esteem to a job—whether that's for a paycheck, volunteer work, or a project outside school—you bring your best self to that work. You're reliable and responsible and do your work to the best of your ability. You get along with and respect your coworkers and supervisors and ask that they respect you, too. When you have healthy self-esteem in the workplace, you're able to learn from constructive criticism and can see your work performance realistically, not over- or underrating your strengths or weaknesses. With healthy self-esteem, you bring honesty and integrity to your job, and people see you as someone they can trust both in and outside the workplace.

Family

When you bring healthy self-esteem to family relationships, you increase the well-being of your whole family. Healthy self-esteem allows you to accept limits your parents or other elders place on you without feeling disrespected or put down. It helps you stand up for and express your own thoughts and feelings appropriately, showing maturity instead of childishness. Healthy self-esteem helps you let go of resentment and bitterness and tolerate disagreements without turning them into grudges or battles. It lets you see the good in each family member even if you don't always like their behavior. Healthy self-esteem creates respect for different opinions, appropriate and open communication, and safe conflict resolution. It builds bridges instead of walls between family members.

How This Book Can Help You Develop Healthy Self-Esteem

You already believe something about yourself and your worth. You already choose thoughts and actions that create good or bad feelings about yourself. The purpose of this book is to teach you specific thoughts and actions that will create healthy self-esteem. These thoughts and actions are presented through six principles that include three core beliefs and three groups of power-filled choices.

Part 1 teaches principles 1, 2, and 3 in the form of core beliefs that are the foundation for taking charge of your self-esteem, truly understanding your value on this planet, and knowing that the best person you can possibly be is yourself. When these beliefs are your inner anchors, you bring them to every situation you encounter, and they give you the power to make behavior choices that will continue to develop and sustain healthy self-esteem.

Part 2 teaches principles 4, 5, and 6 in the form of power-filled choices that create positive experiences in every area of your life. The success these choices bring will help you develop, grow, and maintain an unwavering healthy self-esteem.

Concepts described under each principle are divided into four sections:

Learn gives an explanation of the concept. Read this section to understand the idea that's being presented.

Explore provides exercises for discovering your personal connection to the concept. Complete as many as you like to learn about yourself.

Become provides exercises for making positive changes around this concept. Completing these will help you start creating healthy self-esteem.

Affirm gives statements to help your brain claim the concept. The more you repeat these affirmations, the more the principles of healthy self-esteem will be a part of your thinking and the more empowered you will be.

As you complete any of the exercises, try to observe your answers with an open and curious mind. If you find you're judging yourself, just make an objective mental note of that behavior. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers. The purpose of everything in this book is simply to feed your personal growth.

Since many of the exercises ask you to write an answer or make a

list, you'll need separate paper to complete them. It can be helpful to keep all your answers in one place, like a paper or electronic journal. Writing down the answers helps your brain both learn the concept and make the changes you want more quickly.

There are also a number of exercises using visualization, or imagining something that you'd like to accomplish. This may be new to you, but give it a try. Visualization helps make changes in your brain that pave the way for real-life success. This technique is used by many successful athletes, actors, and businesspeople.

Finally, as you travel through this book, keep in mind these suggestions to help you succeed:

Make progress, not perfection, your goal.

At any moment, know that wherever you are on your path is exactly where you're supposed to be.

Be gentle with yourself. There are many tough life circumstances that make it difficult to put new thoughts and actions into place.

Allow yourself time, understanding, and any emotions that arise. It's an act of wisdom and maturity to ask for help when you need it. Find an adult you trust to give you some support or guidance in hard times.

Take breaks, but don't give up.

Relax and enjoy the ride!

part 1

core beliefs

When we believe in something, it means we accept it as true. If you believe in the Tooth Fairy, you tell yourself it's true that when you lose a tooth and put it under your pillow, a tiny fairy will swoop into your room while you're sleeping, pick up the tooth, and leave you a gift in its place. If you believe the earth revolves around the sun, you tell yourself it's true that our planet is in orbit around the nearest star. If you believe your algebra teacher is a fair grader, you tell yourself it's true the grade he gives you accurately reflects your work.

Beliefs are powerful. They directly affect our feelings and behaviors, and so, the course of our lives. Most of the choices we make every day are the result of our beliefs, whether we're conscious of it or not. When you choose a bagel over a donut, it might stem from the belief that a bagel is better for you, or the belief that you'll like the taste better. This choice could affect your health and happiness for the rest of the morning. If you choose to take earth science instead of oceanography, it might stem from the belief that you'll enjoy the subject more, or maybe from the belief that it will be easier. This choice could affect your ability to stay awake in class, your grade point average, or even your choice of college.

Your beliefs about yourself create your self-esteem. Your self-esteem influences the choices you make. The choices you make shape your life.

Garret believes he's a loser. He tells himself it's true he can't achieve his goals, so he chooses not to try because he thinks he'll just fail anyway.

Brooke believes she's inferior to other kids at school. She tells herself it's true she's somehow second-rate, so she chooses to isolate herself and doesn't reach out to make friends because she thinks she'll be rejected.

Adam believes he has equal value to everyone else and a chance at succeeding in most things he tries. He tells himself he's inherently just as good as, but not superior to, other people, and if he doesn't succeed at one thing, he'll try something else. Adam chooses to seek out new friendships and take steps to reach his goals. When the results are positive, he enjoys them; when they're not, he chooses to try again or move on.

The three core beliefs presented in this section are beliefs that underlie healthy self-esteem. When you understand and embrace them, your choices will reflect them, and your life path will be created from a foundation of healthy self-esteem.

The Town Up Ahead

One day, a traveler pulled into a gas station in the countryside and asked the attendant, "What are the people like in the town up ahead?" The attendant replied, "What were the people like in the town you just left?" "Oh," replied the traveler, "they were awful. Rude, cold, unfriendly, hostile. They wouldn't give me the time of day." "I'm sorry to tell you," said the attendant, "but you're going to find the same sort of people in the town up ahead."

A little while later, a second traveler driving in the same direction pulled into the same gas station and asked the same question. "Excuse me," the traveler said, "could you tell me what the people are like in the town up ahead?" "Well," said the attendant, "what were the people like in the town you just left?" "Oh, they were wonderful," the traveler said. "Warm, friendly, kind, patient. Went out of their way to help a stranger." The attendant said, "I'm happy to tell you you're going to find the same kind of people in the town up ahead."

People mistakenly think things are inherently good or bad. More truthfully, things are what we perceive them to be. What we think determines how we experience everything in life, including ourselves.

principle 1

My Self-Esteem Is in My Hands

Many teens mistakenly believe they don't have control over their own self-esteem. They think things like *My brother is so much smarter than me—I can't have healthy self-esteem* or *My coach doesn't play me every game—I can't feel good about myself* or *The person I was dating dropped me for someone else—I'm clearly a loser*.

If our core belief is that someone else or outer circumstances control our self-esteem, we'll be right—these things will control how we feel about ourselves. And we'll never have healthy self-esteem.

If, however, our core belief is that our self-esteem is in our hands, we can always choose to feel good about ourselves no matter what's going on outside of us. We'll gain the benefits of healthy self-esteem, and our thoughts will sound more like these:

My brother is so much smarter than me—but I'm creative; we both have valuable strengths.

My coach doesn't play me every game—but if it's important enough, I'll ask her how I can improve so that I can play more.

The person I was dating dropped me for someone else—I'm disappointed, but I'll feel better with time, and I'll meet someone else, too.

When we understand that our self-esteem is in our hands, we're empowered. We're in control of what we think and feel about ourselves, not other people. We can choose to have healthy self-esteem in every situation—with family, friendships, dating, school, and work.

Your Self-Esteem Comes from Your Thoughts

It's not just a nice idea. Your self-esteem is in your hands. It comes from how you think about yourself—and how you think about yourself is completely up to you. No one else can decide which thoughts you hold on to. No one else can make you believe anything

you don't want to believe. So no one else controls your self-esteem.

It's true other people can tell you their opinions. They can share ideas, information, and beliefs. But other people's thoughts don't automatically become yours unless you choose to let them.

For example, imagine you just got a haircut and you don't like it. Your friend tells you she thinks it looks great. Does that mean you automatically think it's great, too? No. You might consider what she says and then change your mind, thinking instead the haircut isn't that bad. Choosing that thought can make you dislike it less or even start to like it a lot. However, you could also hear your friend's opinion, consider it, and decide that no matter what she says you still don't like your haircut.

Other people can tell us their opinions, but they can't tell us what to think. Only we can decide what we will think.

Jonna was diagnosed with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD. This means the way her brain works makes it harder for her to focus on certain things. Jonna's cousin, Richie, says, "That's weird. I don't know anyone who has that. You're going to have a hard time in school—and in everything!" Jonna could listen to what Richie says and think, He's right, I'm weird. I'll probably lose my friends when they find out. I might not pass my classes either; it'll be so embarrassing. How can I face people? Or she could listen to what Richie says and think, Richie doesn't know much about ADHD; it's a pretty common disorder. I'll need some help at first, but lots of people need help with things. It doesn't make me weird. Richie can't choose Jonna's thoughts for her. Only Jonna can decide what she thinks.

Steven plays volleyball on a city league. He wasn't very skilled at the start of the season, but he practiced a lot and improved. His original coach was encouraging and happy with his progress. He told Steven he was becoming an asset to the team and hoped he signed up again.

This season, the team has a new coach. He isn't as happy with Steven's skills and never thinks he plays well enough. Steven could recall his first coach and think, I'm doing well and the team values me. He could listen to the second coach and think, I don't play as well as I should. He could also think, I've improved a lot and can still improve more. No matter what anyone else says, only Steven can decide what he'll think about his skills.