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► TIPS TO DEVELOP A HEALTHY SELF CONCEPT...2

Cognitive *focus*

ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF INDIVIDUAL CLIENTS AND PLANTING THE SEEDS FOR A SECURE FUTURE.

Centre for Cognitive Therapy

The Centre for Cognitive Therapy is dedicated to helping clients secure sustainable psychological well being. The current issue addresses the important issue of self concept in emotional health and happiness.

Developing a Healthy Self Concept: Myths and Traps

The Oxford dictionary definition of esteem is to respect or admire. Self-esteem is defined as confidence in one's worth or abilities. Today we hear much about developing positive self-esteem and how detrimental low self-esteem is. Today, experts aggressively dispute the notion of developing positive self-esteem as healthy. All are in agreement that low self-esteem (self downing) is very unhealthy. But is the answer to have a high global self rating? The answer is categorically – no.

This completely erroneous principle

has led to an endless stream of self-help books, parenting directives, educational policies and therapy sessions for many decades. Today, the concept of building positive self-esteem is not only considered erroneous, but the source of much depression, anxiety, anger and frustration.

The first problem is associated with the entire concept of appraising or rating human beings worth in a global way. To esteem is associated with rating and coming out positive - to the point of admiration.

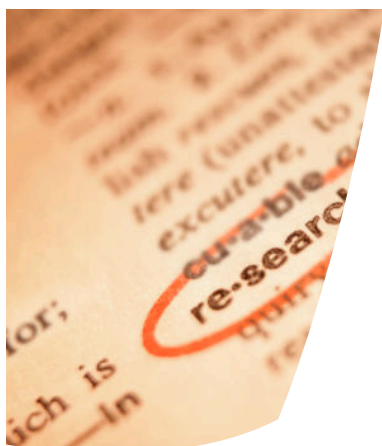


Our obsessive rating of ourselves, trying to evaluate our worth, leads to constantly feeling we come up short. There are no accepted criteria for self rating so we are better off giving it up altogether and simply accepting ourselves.



UNCONDITIONAL SELF ACCEPTANCE

We will feel much better both in the short term and the long term by accepting ourselves with flaws and fallibilities, than by trying to live under the illusion that we can, and must, have few (or fewer) flaws. Accepting ourselves unconditionally means that we recognize that all human beings have both strengths and weaknesses and that our value as a human being is unconditional; not a function of an arbitrary 'tally' of our personal characteristics. Since there are no rules or criteria to determine our worth, it is established primarily by our personal decision to accept that 'I am OK'. Thus, we no longer live under the narcissistic principle that we should be a much better person.



Getting the most from our research analysis

Research has identified the important connection between unconditional self acceptance and a healthy concept of our 'self' .

A second major problem with pursuing high self-esteem is that if achieved, it will be highly conditional. For example if I respect and admire my 'self' based on success in a certain area, I can only continue to give myself such a high rating if I continue to meet my arbitrary standards for success. If I begin to fall short, then my rating of my 'self' tends to drop resulting in vulnerability to self-downing, depression and anxiety.

A third problem with pursuing high self-esteem is that you may actually achieve it. In which case

you would consider that you had become 'a better person', which begs the question of better than what? The answer of course is better than others, not a good stance in social relations. The pop psychology notion that you need to 'love yourself before you can love others' is fraught with major difficulties, not the least of which is the fact that in practice, loving yourself becomes a serious obstacle to caring for others. To pursue a high self-rating is to pursue narcissism.

Today, experts view both self-downing (low self-esteem) and high self-esteem as equally unhealthy. 'I'm OK, You're OK' is the goal; unconditional acceptance of our self and others. Give up the rating and comparisons altogether and simply accept that we are all human with inevitable flaws and fallibilities.

Attempting to rate our 'self' is a fruitless pursuit.
Unconditional self acceptance is the goal.
We can rate acts, but not the actors themselves.

SMARTER THERAPY:
A healthy self concept.



1. Accept Yourself. You have flaws like everyone else. Accept this without rating or condemning yourself.
2. Avoid the urge to compete. Compete at tennis (or other pursuits) but never compete for status as a person.
3. When criticized, agree with your critic whenever possible. This will help reduce your defensiveness and help to work against self rating.



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