

ICPPD's Personal Development Course with a Difference!

Take time to sit with these questions, you might like to write or reflect on the answers :

- How do I feel physically in the past few days?
- How am I emotionlly?
- What thoughts fill my mind these days?
- What is in my heart and soul today?
- How would I describe my relationship with myself at this moment?
- How is my intimate relationship with my significant other?
- How are family reationships in general?
- How are my friendships going?
- How am I relating with work colleagues?
- How am I getting on with people in my community?

(Excerpts from lesson 1, week 1 of ICPPD's On-Line Personal Development Course)

In this lesson I invite you to take the opportunity to reflect on and identify - what it is you would like to get from this course, and what you would like to change about yourself at this time, and why?

What is Self-Esteem?

For me self-esteem is about lovability and capability. If I feel I am lovable and worthy of giving and receiving love, then I feel good about myself. If I think I am a capable person, that I have abilities and skills, that I am somewhat able to take care of myself in the world, then I feel good about myself. The following content helps explain and inform you about self-esteem.

Most people's thoughts and feelings about themselves fluctuate somewhat based on their daily experiences. The grade you get on an exam, how your friends treat you, ups and downs in a romantic relationship can all have a temporary impact on how you feel about yourself.

Your self-esteem, however, is something more fundamental than the normal ups and downs associated with situational changes. For people with good self-esteem, normal ups and downs may lead to temporary fluctuations in how they feel about themselves, but only to a limited extent. In contrast, for people with poor self-esteem, these ups and downs drastically impact the way they see themselves.

Poor vs. Healthy Self-Esteem

People with poor self-esteem often rely on how they are doing in the present to determine how they feel about themselves. They need positive external experiences (e.g., compliments from friends) to counteract the negative feelings and thoughts that constantly plague them. Even then, the good feeling (such as from a good grade or compliment) is usually temporary.

Healthy self-esteem is based on our ability to assess ourselves accurately and still be accepting of who we are. This means being able to acknowledge our strengths and

weaknesses (we all have them!) and at the same time recognise that we are worthy and worthwhile.

Where Does Self-Esteem Come From?

Our self-esteem evolves throughout our lives as we develop an image of ourselves through our experiences with different people and activities. Experiences during childhood play a particularly large role in the shaping of self-esteem. When we were growing up, our successes, failures, and how we were treated by our family, teachers, coaches, religious authorities, and peers, all contributed to the creation of our self-esteem.

Childhood experiences that contribute to healthy self-esteem include:

- Being listened to
- Being spoken to respectfully
- Getting appropriate attention and affection
- Having accomplishments be recognised and mistakes or failures be acknowledged and accepted

Childhood experiences that may lead to low self-esteem include:

- Being harshly criticised
- Being physically, sexually, or emotionally abused
- Being ignored, ridiculed, or teased
- Being expected to be perfect all the time. People with low self-esteem were often given messages—from parents, teachers, peers, or others—that failed experiences (losing a game, getting a poor grade, etc.) were failures of their whole self

What Does Your "Inner Voice" Say?

Our past experiences, even the things we don't usually think about, continue to impact our daily life in the form of an "inner voice." Although most people do not hear this voice in the same way they would a spoken one, it acts in a similar way, continuously repeating childhood messages to us.

For people with healthy self-esteem, the messages of the inner voice are usually accepting and reassuring. For people with low self-esteem, the inner voice becomes a harsh critic, punishing one's mistakes and belittling one's accomplishments.

Consequences of Low Self-Esteem:

Low self-esteem can have devastating consequences. It can:

- create anxiety, stress, loneliness, and increased likelihood of depression
- cause problems with friendships and romantic relationships
- seriously impair academic and job performance
- lead to increased vulnerability to drug and alcohol abuse

Worst of all, these negative consequences themselves reinforce the negative self-image and can take a person into a downward spiral of lower and lower self-esteem and increasingly unproductive or even actively self-destructive behaviour.

Three Steps to Improved Self-Esteem:

Change doesn't necessarily happen quickly or easily, but it can happen. You are not powerless! Once you have accepted, or are at least willing to entertain the possibility that

you can change, there are steps you can take to begin to improve the way you feel about yourself:

Step 1: Rebut the Inner Critic

The first important step in improving self-esteem is to begin to challenge the negative messages of the critical inner voice. Here are some typical examples of the inner critic and some strategies to rebut that critical voice.

- Unfairly harsh inner critic: "People said they liked my presentation, but it was nowhere near as good as it should have been. I can't believe no-one noticed all the places I messed up. I'm such an imposter." Acknowledge strengths: "Wow, they really liked it! Maybe it wasn't perfect, but I worked hard on that presentation and did a good job. I'm proud of myself."
- An inner voice that generalises unrealistically: "I got an F on the test. I don't understand anything in this class. I'm such an idiot. Who am I fooling? I shouldn't be taking this class. I'm stupid, and I don't belong in college." Be specific: "I did poorly on this test, but I've done O.K. on all the homework. There are some things here that I don't understand as well as I thought I did, but now I have a better idea of how to prepare and what I need to work on. I've done fine in other tough classes; I'm confident I can do this."
- An inner critic that makes illogic leaps: "He's frowning. He didn't say anything, but I know it means that he doesn't like me!" Challenge illogic: "O.K., he's frowning, but I don't know why. It could have nothing to do with me. Maybe I should ask."
- An inner voice that catastrophises: "She turned me down for a date! I'm so embarrassed and humiliated. No one likes or cares about me. I'll never find a girlfriend. I'll always be alone." Be objective: "Ouch! That hurt. Ok, she doesn't want to go out with me. That doesn't mean no one does. I know I'm a nice person. I'm confident that in time I'll find someone who's as interested in me as I am in her."

Step 2: Practice Self-Compassion

Rebutting your critical inner voice is an important first step, but it is not enough. Practicing self-compassion means treating yourself with the same empathy you would show others. If a friend were having a hard time, you'd be likely to be extra caring and supportive. You deserve the same treatment! Rather than focusing on evaluating yourself, instead you can acknowledge when things are difficult and try to nurture and care for yourself in these times especially. For example:

- Forgive yourself when you don't do all you'd hoped. Try to be gentle with yourself rather than critical of yourself when things don't go as you had hoped. This can be surprisingly hard if you are not used to doing it, but recognising that such experiences are inevitable can help.
- Recognise your humanness. As humans we all make mistakes and we are all impacted by external factors that we can't control. Accepting our "humanness" helps us to feel more connected to others rather than feeling we are enduring these types of experiences all alone. Recognising that mistakes are an inevitable part of being human helps us to be more compassionate with ourselves and others.
- Be mindful of your emotions. If you do feel upset about a situation, try to allow yourself to experience that emotion in a balanced way, without suppressing it or getting completely swept up in the feeling. When practicing mindfulness, try not to

judge yourself for having negative emotions. If you can remember that emotions come and go and eventually pass, it will help you to not become overwhelmed by your feelings.

Step 3: Get Help from Others

Getting help from others is often the most important step a person can take to improve his or her self-esteem, but it can also be the most difficult. People with low self-esteem often don't ask for help because they feel they don't deserve it, but other people can help to challenge the critical messages that come from negative past experiences. Here are some ways to reach out to others:

- Ask for support from friends. Ask friends to tell you what they like about you or think you do well. Ask someone who cares about you to just listen to you vent for a little while without trying to fix things. Ask for a hug. Ask someone who loves you to remind you that they do.
- Get help from teachers and other helpers. Go to professors, advisors, or tutors to ask for help in classes if you need it. Remember: they are there to help you learn! If you lack self-confidence in certain areas, take classes or try out new activities to increase your sense of competence. For example, take a math class, join a dance club, take swimming lessons, etc.
- Talk to a therapist or counsellor. Sometimes low self-esteem can feel so painful or difficult to overcome that the professional help of a therapist or counsellor is needed. Talking to a counsellor is a good way to explore these feelings.



Personal Sharing from tutor:

The following is an excerpt from my journal, I am sharing in the hope that it may support you in some way –

“In the window in my kitchen at home there is a painted wine bottle in which a candle is burning. It has been well used and this is visible by the candle wax which has accumulated over time.

In our personal development courses we invite participants to mindfully paint a bottle, to symbolise their intentions for change in their life. It is then varnished and it becomes a delightful candleholder. The painted bottle is called a wish or hope bottle. My current bottle is painted in bright colours, and has various spirals on it that for me represent my journey into and out of my inner and outer life. The accumulated wax enhances it and is comforting to me. It is a reminder of light and hope, and it brings me into the present moment and gratitude.

I first saw this ritual and how it represented hope, when I attended a retreat in a cancer centre (I didn't have cancer, but was offered the opportunity to attend). Here were twenty people who were in various stages of recovery and dying, some of whom were in the last days of their lives on earth. On the kitchen table sat the hope candle. This candle remained

lit throughout the day as a reminder that as long as we are here, there is always time to change, to make ammends, to live fully.

I was in the company of people who were very ill, some facing death, who continued to have wishes and hopes. I felt humbled, privilaged to be in their presence and grateful for being alive.

I went home and painted my bottle, placed and lit my candle mindfully, and it reminded me to live more fully, to love myself and others, and I began a new relationship with myself..."

Perhaps you might like to ritualise your intention and commitment. Some ways of doing this is by sitting silently with yourself, writing in your journal or finding your own personal way of symbolising the changes you would like to make.

ICPPD offer a 10 week Personal Development Course which has been described as "*a life changing experience*" this course comprises of 8 – 16 like minded people of all ages and backgrounds and takes place at ICPPD, Athlone and in SCCUL Ballybane Enterprise Centre, Galway. The next course commences on Tuesday 8th October 2019. Please visit www.icppd.com for details.

You can enrol on the 6 Week Online Personal Development Course at any time and study at home, at your own pace, www.icppd.com