

WHAT TO LOOK FOR WHEN YOU OR OTHERS ARE MOVING TOWARD PERSONAL EMPOWERMENT: Some Signs That Higher Self-Esteem Is Present In You Or In Those Around You

Re-writing your shame-based “life script” through the process of becoming more empowered in your life is the way to develop higher self-esteem. Self-esteem has to do with how you think and feel about yourself and how you look at and treat others:

- *Do you know who you really are and do you have a clear sense of what you feel, think, want, and need in your life and do you then communicate that assertively and respectfully with other people?*
- *Do you like yourself and accept yourself for who you really are (including your shortcomings, “character defects,” and your “dark side”)?*
- *Do you feel competent, lovable, and accepted by other important people in your life most of the time and do you feel that way toward them as well?*
- *Do you see yourself as basically worthwhile and “okay as a person?”*

The following list discusses some important signs that indicate when self-esteem is present. No one has all of them, but they can offer you some guidelines if you want to work at improving your self-esteem and feeling better about yourself and the world around you.

PEOPLE WITH HIGHER SELF-ESTEEM TEND TO:

POSSESS SELF-UNDERSTANDING, PERSONAL INSIGHT, AND A SENSE OF HUMOR

- Are aware of why and how they have become the person they are in the present
...i.e. how their family of origin, life experiences, relationships, and the larger culture have influenced and affected them
- Are capable of slowing down enough to “enjoy the moment” and to look inside themselves in order to be introspective and create self-awareness
...Are able to recognize:
 - ...who they are
 - ...what they are like
 - ...what they want to do in their lives
 - ...what they think, feel, want, and need
 - ...what their core values are
 - ...e.g. being honest and open with others, having a desire to help others, being respectful, being fair, having compassion and empathy for others
 - ...how they are motivated to accomplish what needs to be done
- Are able to take clear responsibility for their thoughts, feelings, wants, and needs

- Are able to take clear and full responsibility for themselves and their actions (and their inaction as well!)
 - ...are self-motivated (e.g. to learn, to participate, to achieve) and take initiative in their day-to-day lives and can give themselves a “pep talk” whenever this is needed
 - ...set up specific short-term and long-term goals and demonstrate ongoing effort to reach these goals that they see as being important to them
 - ...acknowledge and reframe their mistakes and actively look for ways to learn from them and forgive themselves for the mistakes they have made in the past and present
 - ...recognize and accept the consequences of their actions and do not attempt to blame or focus on others for their own mistakes or shortcomings
- Can recognize and change their own tendency to become shaming and critical with themselves and can treat themselves in a more positive and respectful way, even during difficult and stressful times
- Are aware of the impression they make on others and clearly recognize the impact and effect they have on other people
- Have a strong, warm, and nurturing sense of humor and are able to laugh (or chuckle) in a non-judgmental way at the foibles and idiosyncrasies of themselves and those around them

BE SELF-ACCEPTING AND EMOTIONALLY SECURE

- Know and accept themselves and are aware of and value their own abilities and competencies:
 - ...have a sense of what they can and can’t do well
 - ...and are realistic about their strengths and their “weaknesses”
 - ...take on the challenge of improving themselves in areas where they are not doing as well as they would like
 - ...have confidence in their own judgment and are able to act on judgments they have made
 - ...are able to listen to and weigh suggestions and feedback from others without needing to deny and minimize shortcomings, react defensively, or try to “explain away” their behavior
- Have moments of intense joy and satisfaction and also have moments of intense sadness and despair
 - ...they allow themselves to experience the whole range of human emotions and feel comfortable that this is simply a part of living their lives
- Are assertive, independent, and self-sufficient when appropriate but are also willing and able to clearly ask for help from others whenever this is necessary
 - ...and are aware of when they need to do this
- Have a sense of being involved in worthwhile and meaningful activities
 - ...even if others don’t necessarily recognize this

- Are able to behave in a genuine and sincere manner around others
...not putting themselves down nor feeling a need to “fake it” in order to impress other people
- Are not overly preoccupied with what others think (i.e. they work to detach from others’ emotions and reactions in a healthy way when necessary and appropriate):
...e.g. about their appearance; about how they act; about their opinions, feelings, and values
- Have a clear sense of what feels “right” and “okay” for them
...i.e. the values that are important to them and that they attempt to live by
- Are able to receive and accept compliments from others
- Give themselves credit for who they are and what they accomplish in their lives
- Generally see themselves as useful, capable, and likable people

HAVE A STRONGLY-FELT AND UNIFYING PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

- Can articulate a belief system, a set of values, and a personal philosophy of life
...what they believe in and stand for
...what their purpose in life is
...what their life goals are
- Are able to make judgments and then take action in response to their own beliefs and values without having to be directed by what others may say, think, or expect
...although they can also be open to others’ ideas, feedback, and guidance
- Have made some conscious choices and decisions about their own interests, skills, values, occupational role, sexual identity, and the like and have taken specific and concrete steps toward acting on them (or have a plan for doing this)
...thus, they are actually living by the values that they espouse for themselves

RELATE WARMLY AND EFFECTIVELY WITH OTHERS

- Treat others in a humane, caring, and respectful fashion
...avoid the use of demeaning and derogatory words and threatening, controlling, and intimidating actions
...provide emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and physical nurturance and support for others
...i.e. help others succeed in who they wish to be and what they wish to do
...view people as separate and distinctive human beings and not as objects to be manipulated to achieve a certain end
...are willing and able, at times, to take care of and offer support to others who need their assistance, encouragement, and comfort
- Work hard to stay aware of and effectively intervene in their negative, critical, cynical, shaming, and competitive self-talk about other people and try hard to view others in a positive light

- Are willing to take the risk to connect in meaningful ways with others
 - ...actively talk/interact with others and look forward to meeting and getting to know new people in their lives (i.e. they are interested in others and ask open-ended questions whenever this is appropriate)
 - ...can communicate their thoughts, feelings, wants, and needs clearly, respectfully, and assertively to others
 - ...take emotional risks to be honest and genuine with others, even to the point of potentially hurting others' feelings when they see things differently
 - ...i.e. disagreeing and setting limits with and clearly saying "no" to others at times
 - ...are willing and able to work cooperatively with others to handle problems that arise and then move forward
- Have empathy and compassion for others and work hard to understand and accept others' thoughts, feelings, points of view, and perspectives
 - ...actively attend to what others say and have some sense of what others might be thinking or feeling (and are willing to ask about this directly, if necessary)
 - ...can accurately and realistically perceive others and tend to see them for who they actually are
 - ...are willing and able to work at feeling what it may be like "to be in someone else's shoes"
- Recognize and acknowledge conflicts and are skilled in working through them
 - ...are able to remain calm while handling conflicts or to take a respectful time-out whenever this is necessary
 - ...are able to identify differences in values, beliefs, or competing interests that could be the source of conflict with others
 - ...suggest and work at constructive ways of examining and resolving conflicts
- Are capable of deep and intimate involvements with other people (including a partner and friends) and make efforts to build an emotional support system for themselves
 - ...can know, love, and respect others and be known, loved, and respected by those people in return
 - ...can take others into their confidence to share their innermost thoughts, feelings, and ideas and are able to develop trust in their relationships with other people
 - ...are less concerned with being loved than in offering love to others and act in a caring and loving way toward other people in the daily lives

REALISTICALLY PERCEIVE WORLD OUTSIDE THEMSELVES

- Recognize that things can go wrong and that, when this happens, it is not always due:
 - ...to a personal "failure;"
 - ...to someone else's incompetence or "stupidity;" or
 - ...to other people "being out to get them."
- Are less likely to blame others for problems or "issues" that they experience in their lives with those people

- Are tolerant of life's ambiguity and uncertainty and recognize that things won't always be "clear-cut," "right and wrong," "good and bad," or "black and white"
...i.e. they recognize that life is primarily made up of "shades of gray"
- Are capable of recognizing and resolving problems and issues that arise in their lives:
 - ...recognize and define what the problem is
 - ...identify and use other people and outside resources to help solve the problem whenever this is necessary
 - ...generate alternative solutions
 - ...anticipate possible consequences (both positive and negative) regarding potential solutions
 - ...decide what to do and then actually follow through and do it
 - ...evaluate the outcome (how well the solution worked) and celebrate if the problem was resolved or look at other options if the solution is not working as well as they would like
- Are able to be productive and accomplish what they set out to do
 - ...can focus on and follow through with difficult, and sometimes tedious and boring, tasks
 - ...take pleasure in and give themselves credit for completing their work well
...although they do not need to be or to act "perfect"
 - ...can be creative and have fun in work- and hobby-related activities

REACH OUT ACTIVELY TO THE WORLD AROUND THEM

- Are willing and able to take risks and to try new activities and experiences
- Make efforts to broaden and deepen their current skills and interests
- Approach life with a sense of excitement, zest, and discovery (like children often do)
 - ...can find something interesting to do, to look at, or to think about in almost any setting and thus are seldom bored
 - ...can actually learn from failure or disappointment in their lives
- Accept and value differences between people and groups
 - ...are willing and increasingly able to talk and work with people who are very different in age, sex, race, class, health, personality, and lifestyle, and find satisfaction in doing this
 - ...are interested in and willing to become more informed about people from other cultures, social conditions, and lifestyles, through:
 - ...direct experiences (e.g. travel, volunteer activities)
 - ...indirect experiences (e.g. reading, videos, the internet)
 - ...have a sense of the fellowship of the human community and of human solidarity to the point where the welfare of others becomes identified with and even as important as their own welfare
 - ...can both suffer with the pain and rejoice with the joy of others
...i.e. experience a decreased need be competitive with others or to compare themselves to other people

- Have a sense of their own personal and political power and the belief that they are making a difference in and a contribution to society and to the world around them
 - ...engage in activities to improve and enlighten the community-at-large
 - ...e.g. volunteer involvement in neighborhood, school, places of worship, their community, and in other areas of their lives
 - ...take risks to make their own suggestions about how to improve things around them
 - ...try to get others involved in efforts to address and to change things in the real world that need to be addressed