



# Self-esteem

Explains what self-esteem is, with tips for improving your self-esteem and ways to get further support.

If you want to contact us with any feedback, email [contact@mind.org.uk](mailto:contact@mind.org.uk).

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# What is self-esteem?

Self-esteem is how we value and perceive ourselves. It's based on our opinions and beliefs about ourselves, which can feel difficult to change. We might also think of this as self-confidence.

Your self-esteem can affect whether you:

- Like and value yourself as a person
- Can make decisions and assert yourself
- Recognise your strengths
- Feel able to try new or difficult things
- Show kindness towards yourself
- Move past mistakes without blaming yourself unfairly
- Take the time you need for yourself
- Believe you matter and are good enough
- Believe you deserve happiness

Under 18? We have resources for you on wellbeing, self-esteem and looking after yourself

[See young people's guides](#)

“For me, low self-esteem is the little voice inside my head that says ‘you're rubbish, you're fat, what's the point, you're not cut out for this’ and so on...”

## What can cause low self-esteem?

The things that affect our self-esteem are different for everyone. Your self-esteem might change suddenly, or you might have had low self-esteem for a while.

There are lots of things in life that may contribute to low self-esteem. For example:

- Being bullied or [abused](#)
- Experiencing prejudice, discrimination or [stigma](#), including [racism](#)
- Losing your job or difficulty finding employment
- Problems at [work](#) or while [studying](#)
- Physical health problems
- [Mental health problems](#)
- Relationship problems, separation or divorce
- Problems with [money](#) or [housing](#)

- Worries about your appearance and body image
- Feeling pressure to meet unrealistic expectations, for example through social media

You might have had some of these experiences. And you might also have had difficulties that aren't listed here. Or there might not be one particular cause.

If you struggle with low self-esteem, it might feel as if making changes will be difficult. But there are things you can try. See our [tips to improve your self-esteem](#) for some suggestions.

“I thought self-hatred was normal. Everyone wakes up every day and looks in the mirror and thinks ‘yeah, I hate that bit about me’, right?”

## Is low self-esteem a mental health problem?

Low self-esteem isn't a mental health problem in itself. But mental health and self-esteem can be closely linked.

Some of the signs of low self-esteem can be signs of a mental health problem. This is especially if they last for a long time or affect your day-to-day life. For example:

- Feeling hopeless or worthless
- Blaming yourself unfairly
- Hating yourself
- Worrying about being unable to do things

Having a mental health problem can also cause you to have low self-esteem. And it might feel harder to cope or take steps to improve your self-esteem if you struggle with your mental health.

If you are worried about your mental health, our pages on [seeking help for a mental health problem](#) have information on how to get support.

“Every time I tried to praise myself it felt tainted with all the self-doubt and self-hatred that's been there all my life. It was then I realised maybe I needed help.”

## How can I improve my self-esteem?

This page has some tips and suggestions for improving your self-esteem. Some people find these ideas useful, but remember that different things work for different people at different times. Only try what you feel comfortable with.

## Be kind to yourself

- Get to know yourself. For example, what makes you happy and what you value in life. You might find it helpful to write in a journal.
- Try to challenge unkind thoughts about yourself. You might automatically put yourself down. If you find yourself doing this, it can help to ask: "Would I talk to, or think about, a friend in this way?"
- Say positive things to yourself. Some people like to do this in front of a mirror. It can feel strange at first, but you may feel more comfortable the more you do it.
- Practise saying no. Being assertive can be difficult if you're not used to it. But agreeing to too many things to please others can be draining. It could help to pause, take a breath and think about how you feel before agreeing to do something you don't want to.
- Try to avoid comparing yourself to others. For example, it might help to limit how much time you spend on social media or online communities. What other people often choose to share about their lives isn't always the full picture.
- Do something nice for yourself. For example, making your favourite meal or playing a game you enjoy.

“I've come to realise that people get to choose what they present about themselves online. In reality, no one's life is perfect and everyone has insecurities.”

## Try to recognise positives

- Celebrate your successes. No matter how small they may seem, take time to praise yourself. For example, this could be getting outside for a walk, being kind to someone, or doing some tidying.
- Accept compliments. You could save them up to look over when you're feeling low or doubting yourself.
- Ask people what they like about you, if you feel comfortable. They may recognise things that you don't think about yourself.
- Write a list of things you like about yourself. For example, this could be a skill that you've learnt, or something you do to help other people.

“I use a gratitude diary, which directly challenges things before I get to a point of feeling overwhelmed and catastrophising everything.”

## Build a support network

- Talk to someone you trust. Having someone listen to you and show they care can help. If you aren't able to open up to someone close to you, you could call a helpline to speak to someone anonymously. For example, you could call [Samaritans](#) on [116 123](#).
- Focus on positive relationships. It might feel difficult to control who you spend time with. But where possible, it can help to spend more time with people who make you feel good about yourself.
- Try peer support. Making connections with people who have similar or shared experiences can help. For example, online communities like Mind's [Side by Side](#) can be a good source of support. See our pages on [peer support](#) to find more ideas.

“For the first time I thought there is no way that all these negative things can be true with so many people in my life who love me for who I am.”

## Try talking therapy

Talking therapies can help with building self-esteem. They can also help you find ways to cope with experiences that affect how you feel about yourself.

See our pages on [talking therapies and counselling](#) for more information.

## Set yourself a challenge

- Learn something new. For example, this could be trying a new hobby or creative activity. Or taking time to read a book about something you don't know about.
- Try volunteering. You might decide to volunteer your time for something you feel passionate about. For more information on volunteering, see the [Do-it Trust website](#).
- Set small goals. This could help things feel more manageable, and give you a greater sense of achievement.

“Martial arts has really boosted my self-esteem, I was awful when I started, but I've been doing it for a year now. Even though I have miles to go until I am advanced I still feel like I have really accomplished something.”

## Look after yourself

- Try to get enough sleep. Getting too little or too much sleep can have a negative impact on how you feel. See our pages on [coping with sleep problems](#) for more information.
- Think about your diet. Eating regularly and keeping your blood sugar stable can make a difference to your mood and energy levels. See our pages on [food and mood](#) for more information.

- Try to do some physical activity. Being active can help mental wellbeing. This may include helping to improve self-esteem. See our pages on [physical activity](#) for more information.
- Spend time outside. Being in green space can often help how we feel. See our pages on [nature and mental health](#) for more information.
- Practise mindfulness and meditation. For example, you could try [Headspace's meditation course for self-esteem](#).
- Try to avoid recreational drugs and alcohol. You might want to use recreational drugs or alcohol to cope with difficult feelings about yourself. But in the long run they can make you feel worse and can prevent you from dealing with underlying problems. See our pages on [recreational drugs and alcohol](#) for more information.
- Sign up to a self-help programme. For example, you could try [Active Monitoring](#) if you are in Wales. Or you could use the [Reading Well books scheme](#) to find books to help with your self-esteem.

See our page on [improving your wellbeing](#) for more tips to help look after yourself.

## Useful contacts

### Mind's services

- [Mind's helplines](#) provide information and support by phone and email.
- [Local Minds](#) offer face-to-face services across England and Wales. These services include talking therapies, peer support and advocacy.
- [Side by Side](#) is Mind's support online community for anyone experiencing a mental health problem.

## Other organisations

### Do IT

[doit.life](#)

Lists UK volunteering opportunities.

### Mind Tools

[mindtools.com](#)

Tips and articles on personal effectiveness, management and leadership.

## Reading Well

[reading-well.org.uk](http://reading-well.org.uk)

A series of self-help books to help you understand and manage your health and wellbeing.

## Samaritans

[116 123](tel:116123) (freephone)

[jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

Freepost SAMARITANS LETTERS

[samaritans.org](http://samaritans.org)

Samaritans are open 24/7 for anyone who needs to talk. You can [visit some Samaritans branches in person](#). Samaritans also have a Welsh Language Line on [0808 164 0123](tel:08081640123) (7pm–11pm every day).

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References are available on request.