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Manchester
Health & Wellbeing
Service



Build Yourself Up

A guide to building
your self-esteem



Produced by buzz Manchester Health & Wellbeing Service
in partnership with Manchester Primary Care Mental Health Team.
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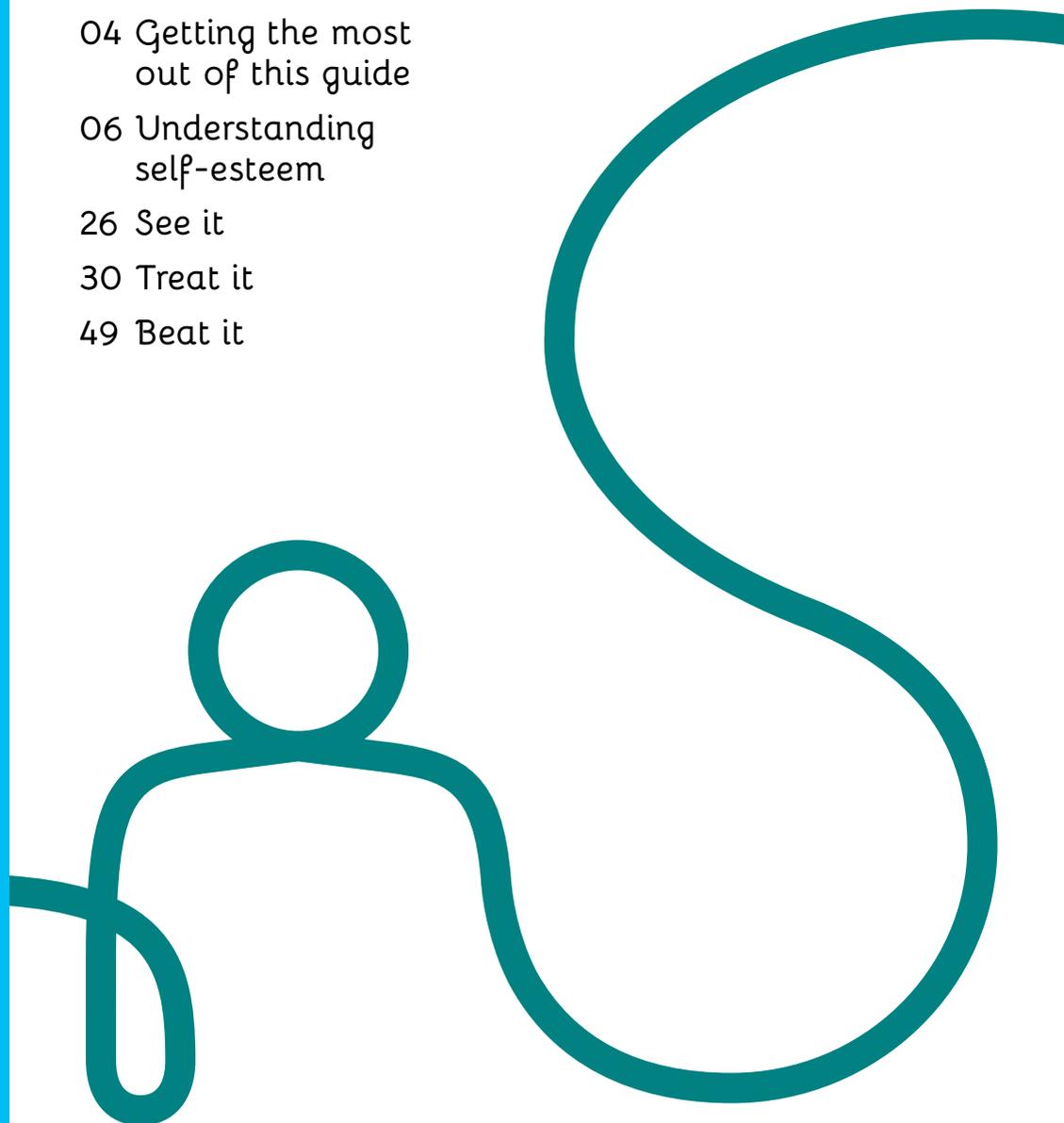
www.buzzmanchester.co.uk

This guide is one of a series about mental health and wellbeing by buzz Manchester Health & Wellbeing Service. You can find more guides at www.mhim.org.uk

‘Build Yourself Up’ is all about self-esteem, what it is and how to build good self-esteem. It’s important to remember that low self-esteem is very common.

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Getting the most out of this guide

This guide aims to:

- Help you understand self-esteem
- Help you see how your self-esteem can affect your life
- Give you tools to help you build your self-esteem
- Give you tools to help you look after yourself

There will be a number of tools for you to try which aim to help you improve your self-esteem and find out what works best for you.

If you find it hard to work through the guide, you might find it useful to talk to someone. This could be a health worker such as your doctor or practice nurse. At the end of the guide there are details about where to get more information, help and treatment.

Understanding self-esteem

This section looks at how you develop self-esteem. It explores how low self-esteem can affect your life and explains how people can end up in a vicious cycle of low self-esteem.

See it

This section will help you see how low self-esteem affects your life.

Treat it

This section has a range of tips to help you improve your self-esteem.

Beat it

This section gives you more ideas on how to make progress. It also lists where you can get further support.

As you read this guide, it will ask you to think about what is going on in your life and how you are feeling. There are spaces in the guide for you to write things down. You may find that this helps you think more clearly about how you feel.

What you'll need:

- A pen and maybe a notebook for extra notes
- Time for reading and thinking about how you can help yourself
- Somewhere quiet to read and think
- To keep going and pace yourself by taking one step at a time
- Support from a family member, friend or health professional if needed

Understanding self-esteem

What is self-esteem?

Self-esteem is the way that we think and feel about ourselves. There are two parts to your self-esteem:

- How much you like yourself
- How skilled you feel

Your self-esteem can change throughout your life. It is affected by things that happen to you and how you cope with them. Self-esteem isn't about feeling better than others or thinking you are supposed to be perfect, it is about being happy with who you are, faults and all, because nobody is perfect.

Everyone has doubts about themselves at times. Sometimes you may feel bad about yourself. You may not feel very secure. This is very common because life can be tough.

This guide will show you a range of ways to improve your self-esteem. It will provide you with tools to help change your unhelpful thoughts. Some tools are about helping you feel more confident, while others will look at ways that you can take care of yourself. Firstly, let's look at self-esteem in more detail and how it can affect you in different ways.

What is low self-esteem?

People with low self-esteem tend to focus more on things that they are not good at doing. They find it hard to see their strengths because they don't feel very good about themselves.

Negative thoughts can make life feel like hard work. When things become tough, people with low self-esteem can find it hard to cope and ask for help which can increase the risk of poor mental health.

Having low self-esteem can make it tougher for people to overcome everyday problems and as a result they are less likely to look after themselves which can affect their health and wellbeing.

What does good self-esteem look like?

What is good self-esteem?

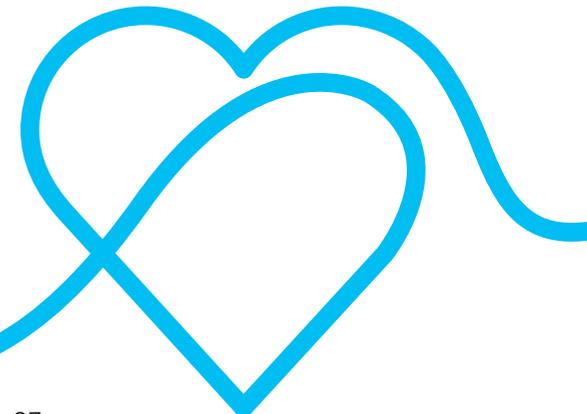
People with good self-esteem see themselves in a positive but realistic way. They know what their strengths and weaknesses are, and that they can't be good at everything. When things do become tough, they feel they can cope or ask for help if they need it.

Good self-esteem makes people more likely to want to try new things because they believe in themselves and have a positive outlook.

If things don't always work out the way they thought it would, people with good self-esteem can accept it and move on quicker and are also more likely to take care of themselves better because they have respect for themselves.

If you have good self-esteem, you will:

- Like yourself
- Enjoy being you
- Only try to be you
- Stand up for yourself
- Be able to compromise
- Admit to your mistakes
- Learn from your mistakes
- Be kind to yourself and others
- Say sorry when you are wrong
- Take responsibility for your life
- Admit when you have a problem
- Ask for help when you need it
- Take risks and want to learn things
- Accept yourself including your faults
- Not feel threatened when someone is better than you at something



What does low self-esteem look like?

Low self-esteem can affect many areas of your life; your thoughts, your emotions, your body and your behaviour.

Here is a list of some of the ways low self-esteem can affect people. Please tick any boxes that apply to your own life.

You feel...

- Hurt and upset
- Jealous and resentful
- Angry and irritable about little things
- Things are out of your control
- Embarrassed and ashamed
- Like you are alone
- Like you can't cope
- Helpless

Your mind...

- Has fixed rules 'I should' or 'I must'
- Reads things in a negative way
- Finds it hard to let go
- Goes over and over things
- Imagines that the worst will happen

Your thoughts might be...

- 'I can't cope'
- 'I don't count'
- 'I hate myself'
- 'No one loves me'
- 'I'm not good enough'
- 'Everyone is better than me'
- 'Trying is the first step to failure'
- 'I am never going to be able to do this'
- 'If people really knew me well, they wouldn't like me'

You might behave by...

- Avoiding things
- Bullying others
- Hurting yourself
- Putting things off
- Eating more or less
- Not looking after yourself
- Being snappy and irritable
- Insisting you are first or last
- Not speaking up for yourself
- Talking too much or too little
- Saying mean things to people
- Gossiping or making fun of others
- Sleeping with people to feel loved
- Doing everything for other people
- Doing or saying things to push others away
- Drinking, taking drugs or smoking

Your body symptoms are...

- Can't sleep or sleep too much
- Butterflies in the stomach
- Need to go to the toilet
- Headaches
- Feel sick
- Tired
- Tearful
- Tense muscles
- Lower sex drive
- Shallow breathing
- More pain in the body

If you have ticked a number of these boxes, you seem to be having symptoms of low self-esteem. However, don't be alarmed, this is common. Even if you have most of them, you can change the things you don't like. You will find some useful ideas in this guide.

How self-esteem develops

Your self-esteem starts to grow as soon as you are born. Babies and children pick up cues about the world and their place in it.

Babies do not see themselves in a good or bad way. They don't worry if their bums look big in a nappy. They learn from a very young age what they are worth, when their needs are met, they feel loved and learn that they have value. This is the beginning of self-esteem.

It develops further if you are encouraged to grow and learn new skills. It helps you to feel good about yourself. If you feel that it's okay to fail, you will not feel so bad when things go wrong. You know that you can learn from it.

When you have a tough time growing up, you can start to feel unlovable. You start to think that you have little or no value. This can stop the growth of good self-esteem. If you feel that it's not okay to fail, you will feel bad when things go wrong and it will strengthen your feelings of worthlessness.

As you get older, you begin to compare yourself to others. You start to work out what you are good at doing. You also become aware of what you are not so good at doing. If you don't match up to other people, you can start to feel bad about yourself. This happens more if you think that you have to be better than everyone else is.

Other people can also affect how much you like yourself. Your friends and family are very important. Your classmates, teachers and colleagues also play a role. If people are nice to you or praise you, it can be easier to feel good about being yourself but if you are bullied, you can end up feeling bad about yourself.

Self-esteem continues to develop when you are an adult. The things that happen to you as you grow up can affect your self-esteem. Even if you had good self-esteem as a child you could end up with low self-esteem as an adult.

Here are some things that affect self-esteem during childhood:

- Not fitting in
- Dealing with an illness
- Going through puberty
- Feeling like the odd one out
- Comparing yourself to others
- Parents having standards you can't meet
- Childhood abuse, neglect and punishment
- Childhood trauma such as family breakdown, bereavement and bullying
- Finding it hard to keep up at school



How self-esteem develops

As a child, you create core beliefs about yourself which depend on what happens to you as you grow up.

When children feel loved and they are encouraged to try new things, they can end up believing 'I have value' or 'I can challenge myself'. These are positive core beliefs.

When children feel unloved and people tell them that they are not good enough, they can end up believing 'I am worthless' or 'I am a bad person'. These are negative core beliefs.

These core beliefs help you make sense of life as a child. They become who you think you are. It is important to remember that these beliefs are only opinion, not fact.

Your core beliefs will develop into rules and beliefs about life which help you to protect your self-esteem, as long as they are not broken.

Take a look at the examples of rules and beliefs on the next page.

Rules of life:

- 'I must not fail'
- 'I must never cry'
- 'I must always be right'
- 'For people to like me, I must put them first'

Beliefs about life:

- 'Failure means that I am weak'
- 'If I ask for help, people will think I am useless'
- 'It doesn't matter what I do, it will never be enough'
- 'If I look different, people will never accept me'

These rules and beliefs are a way of getting through life. They may protect us at first, but in the end, they stop us from being who we really are.

Meet Chris. We will find out more about Chris and his self-esteem throughout this guide.

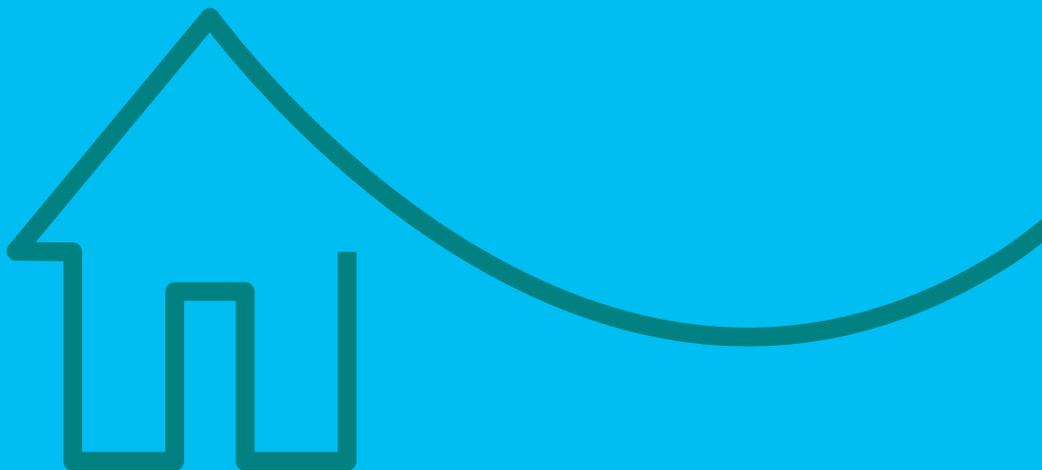
Chris's situation

Chris was brought up in a family where:

- There were a lot of arguments
- The smallest thing done wrong was punished
- Anything done right was ignored
- Chris was told he was 'useless', 'a waste of space' and 'didn't deserve anything'

Chris soon learnt to keep quiet to protect himself. His core beliefs became 'I am unlovable and worthless'. His rules and beliefs about life became 'I must never give my opinion' and 'if I speak up, no one will like me'.

These rules and beliefs mean that he is less likely to stand up for himself. This in turn makes him feel worse about himself. His self-esteem takes a knock.



How self-esteem develops

The way you think affects how you behave. It can limit what you are willing to do. The way that you behave can also make your core beliefs stronger.

By keeping to your rules, you may not get your own needs met. This can happen if your rules mean that you do not speak up for yourself which can make you feel even worse.

While you follow your rules, you can feel okay about yourself but it doesn't give you a chance to see if your thoughts are wrong. Your negative core beliefs will stay the same and you may even believe them more.

Sometimes it is hard to keep to your rules. Things can happen that mean that you have to break them. When you do this, you can feel worse about yourself. You may see it as more proof of how bad you are.

Chris's situation

One of Chris's rules for living is 'I must never give my opinion'. So, Chris keeps himself to himself and rarely speaks his mind. This usually helps him feel okay. Sometimes he feels like his classmates do not like him because they seem to ignore him which makes his core belief that he is 'unlovable and worthless' stronger.

When Chris changes school, every day starts with form time. Everyone has to say something about his or her day. This means that Chris must break his rule.

He gets very anxious. He is not used to speaking in front of so many people. He thinks that he will mess up and people will tease him because one of his beliefs about life is that 'if I speak up, no one will like me'. He expects to fail which strengthens his core belief that he is 'unlovable and worthless'.

What emotions you feel

The way you think and behave has an impact on your emotions. When you have negative core beliefs, it is hard to feel good about yourself.

You are more likely to feel down and unhappy. You may even feel that you don't deserve to feel good. You are also more likely to worry about things. This can be very stressful.

All of these emotions affect how you think, what you do and how your body feels.

Chris's situation

As you have seen, Chris is feeling worthless. He thinks that people are ignoring him and that they think he is stupid. All of this leaves him feeling sad and angry.

How your body feels

The way that you think, behave and feel, all have an impact on your body. How you physically feel can also affect your thoughts, what you do and your emotions.

Chris's situation

Chris gets sad and angry, his breathing gets faster. He starts to feel hot and sweaty. After a while, he gets a headache and begins to feel sick. Now that he feels unwell, he starts to worry more. This makes him feel worse. His feelings of worthlessness increase.

Model of how low self-esteem develops

Example

The model below shows that the way Chris was treated had an effect on his thoughts, emotions, body and behaviour.

Chris's childhood

- There were a lot of arguments
- Anything done wrong was punished
- Anything done right was ignored
- He was told he was 'useless', 'a waste of space' and 'didn't deserve anything'

Thoughts

Core beliefs

'I am unlovable and worthless'

Rules and beliefs about life

'I must never give my opinion'
'If I speak up, no one will like me'
'For people to like me, I must put them first'

Emotions

Sad
Hopeless
Lonely
Used
Angry

Physical

Tired
Headaches
Aching muscles
Feels sick
Upset tummy

Behaviour

Goes out of his way to help people
Rarely speaks his mind
Sits on his own at lunch

What keeps low self-esteem going?

Low self-esteem is affected by:

- The things that happen to you
- The way you think
- What you do
- Your emotions
- How your body feels

Life is like a roller coaster and having low self-esteem can make it harder for you to deal with things that life throws at you. We all have highs and lows.

This is just part of daily life. When something bad happens to you, it takes time to come to terms with it. Sometimes it can make you question what you are worth and how much you like yourself.

Going through hard times like this can affect your body and health and you might feel like you are weak and can't cope. Feeling this way will make you less likely to do things that will challenge your negative core beliefs, which keeps you stuck in a cycle of low self-esteem.

Events that can affect your self-esteem include:

- Retirement
- Being a carer
- A change in life
- Losing your job
- Being threatened
- Being in an abusive relationship
- Being out of work for a long time
- Stressful events such as bereavement
- Loss of your health, such as having a stroke
- Having a long term health condition, such as diabetes
- Finding out you have an illness which you are ashamed of e.g. HIV, depression, diabetes
- Traumatic events, such as being attacked, being flooded and splitting up with your partner

The way that you deal with things like this will depend on your self-esteem.

What keeps low self-esteem going?

When you have negative core beliefs, it is easy to feel bad about yourself, because:

- You are blind to your positives. You only see your bad points and if things go well you think that it was a fluke
- You have biased thinking. You interpret what happens to you in a negative way

Blind to your positives

Picture yourself standing behind a set of blinds at a window. Written on the glass is a list of all the things you think about yourself. It starts with your good points at the top but if you have low self-esteem, it's as if your blinds are only half open because you can only see what is at the bottom.

This confirms all the bad feelings you have about yourself. It is very difficult to see your good points. This makes it hard to challenge your negative thoughts.

Chris's situation

When Chris looks through the blinds, his negative traits stand out much clearer than his positive ones.

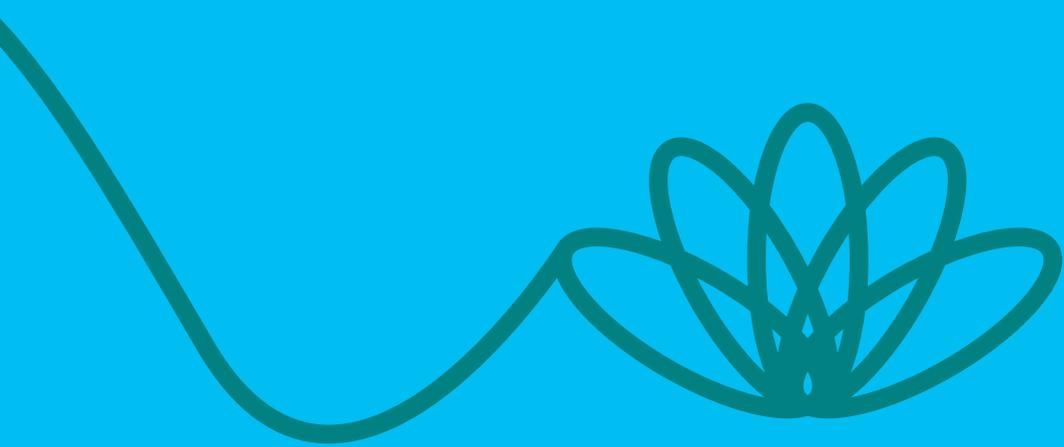
All he can focus on are the bottom three traits:

- Clever
- Organised
- Helpful
- Friendly
- Hard-working
- Funny
- Messy
- Easily wound-up
- Quiet
- Spotty
- Boring

Self-esteem is about having a balanced view of yourself. That includes the good stuff as well as the not so good stuff. You may have a long list of things that you don't like about yourself.

It's common for people to find it hard to see what is good about themselves. When you have low self-esteem it's easy to forget your good qualities for fear of people thinking you are being arrogant or 'big headed'. You have been used to seeing all your negatives for a long time.

If Chris were to open his blinds, he would be able to see his good points. But he is also still aware of those things that he does not like about himself meaning he has a more balanced view of himself.



What keeps low self-esteem going?

Biased thinking

The way you think affects your self-esteem. Your thoughts can seem strong and real.

However, many thoughts are opinions, not facts. Some may be true and helpful. Others can be false and unhelpful.

Everybody has unhelpful thoughts. When you have low self-esteem they happen even more than usual. There are many types of unhelpful thinking. You can find some of them listed on the next page. Can you spot any that you do?

Don't worry if you can tick most of the labels. Once you can label a thought, you can start to challenge it. There are some ideas about how you can do this in the 'Treat It' section of this guide. You can find them from page 30 onwards. The guide 'Unwind Your Mind' has lots of ideas on how to manage unhelpful thoughts. You can download a free copy from www.mhim.org.uk

Chris's thoughts

Chris really believes that he is worthless and unlovable. If something happens that goes against his belief he sees it as an exception to the rule. So when things are good Chris finds it hard to accept, for example when he gets a compliment, he thinks that it isn't true or thinks that it means he usually looks awful.

As he goes through life, Chris usually sees the bad side of things. It seems to back up what he already thinks about himself. He remembers the times he had to speak up in class. All he can think about is how awful he felt. His focus is on how badly he did. This negative focus means that he forgets the times it actually went well.

Tick any thoughts that you find yourself doing:

- Blaming yourself**
You think things are your fault. You do this even if it has little or nothing to do with you.
'It's my fault that people don't like me'
- Jump to conclusions**
You think things without any proof. You guess what people think (mind reading) and predict the future (fortune telling).
'If I speak up, no one will like me'
- All-or-nothing thinking**
You do not see a middle ground. Things are put into 'either/or' groups.
'If I can't get the job, it proves that I have nothing to offer'
- Expecting the worst**
You expect things to go wrong, no matter what. You expect the worst to happen.
'I'll look like a fool'
- Living by fixed rules**
You think you need to live by rules like 'should', 'ought' and 'must'.
'I must never give my opinion'
- Negative focus**
You only see the bad things. You see your weaknesses but not your strengths. 'I am unlovable and worthless'
(Chris ignores all of his skills)

The vicious cycle of low self-esteem

Unhelpful thoughts make you feel worse and lower your self-esteem even more by affecting your emotions and increasing the risk of getting stressed, depressed and anxious.

This is called a vicious cycle. The way you think and behave affect how you feel in your body and your emotions. This keeps the cycle going.

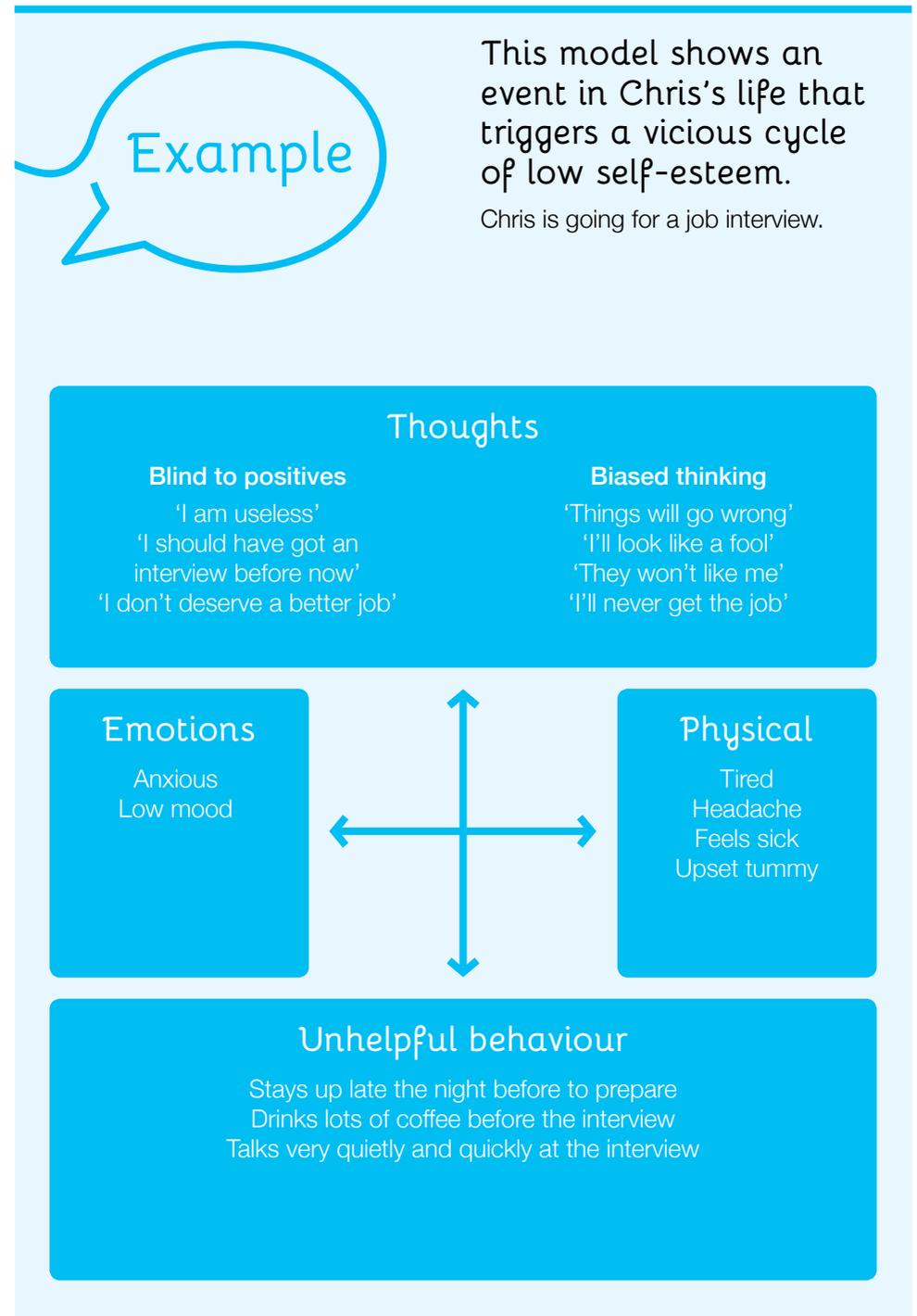
Nobody wants to feel bad about themselves. We try to do things that make us feel better. Some things make us feel great for a bit. However, they can make us feel worse in the end. They keep the cycle going.

Let's have a look at Chris again...

Chris has decided that he needs a new job because he feels people at work are using him. By the end of each day, he feels tired and angry.

After applying for 42 jobs, he is finally going for an interview. Chris is sure that he won't get the job. He almost doesn't even bother going to the interview! He spends the whole evening before the interview trying to prepare. He doesn't go to bed until 2am. The next morning he is very tired. He drinks lots of coffee to try to wake him up.

This means that he has to go to the loo a few times before he leaves the house which makes him leave a bit late. He arrives at the interview just on time. Chris does not feel confident. He speaks very quietly. He also answers without thinking first, so it comes out very rushed.



The vicious cycle of low self-esteem

Chris's situation

At the end of the interview, Chris is sure that he was rubbish. A week later, he gets a letter to tell him that he didn't get the job. This is proof to Chris that he is useless and worthless. This makes him feel even worse about himself.

The company offer him feedback but he chooses not to phone them. If he had phoned, he would have been told: his knowledge was very good; they were impressed with his answers; they could tell he was nervous; someone with more experience got the job. Having low self-esteem stopped Chris from finding out that he actually did well!

“Good self-esteem is about being happy with who you are, faults and all.”

See it

Now it is time to think about you. Can you see any vicious cycles in your life?

There are things you can do to break a cycle of low self-esteem. Do you have any unhelpful thoughts or is there something going on in your life that is affecting you? Try and think about how certain situations change your thoughts and affect your emotional and physical behaviour as a result. Have a look at the model on the next page and fill it in to get a better idea of how your low self-esteem develops. You will also be able to see what keeps the vicious cycle going.

You may find it hard to think about what thoughts you have. If this is the case, carry a note pad around with you or use the 'Your ideas' section on page 50 of this guide. You can then jot down any thoughts that pop into your head.

It can be hard to think of these things by yourself. It can also be quite upsetting. You could ask someone you trust for help and support. You may find talking to a therapist would help. There are details about services in the 'Beat it' section of this guide on page 49.



Your situation

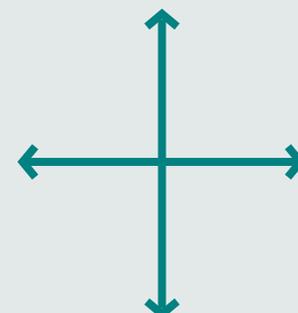


Things in your life, past and present

Fill in all the boxes on the model below. You can use the tick boxes on page 8 and 9 to help. Add anything else you can think of.

Thoughts

Emotions



Physical

Unhelpful behaviour

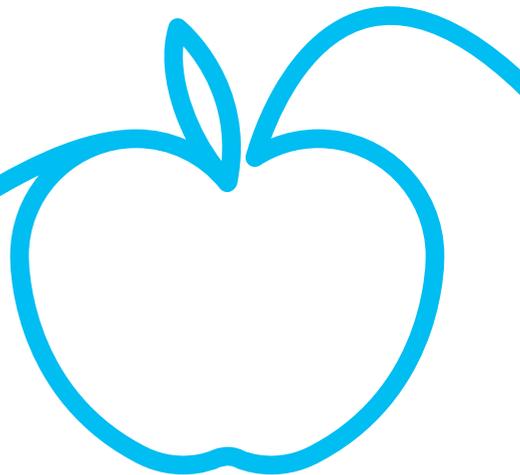
What next?

You should now have a better idea of what affects your self-esteem. The good news is there are many things you can do to change this cycle. If you make a small change in one area, it will affect all the other areas.

The next part of this guide looks at what you can do to improve your self-esteem. It covers a range of hints and tips. Some things you can do straight away. Other things are going to take more time and practice.

Take your time and read all of the 'Treat it' section. Choose one thing to try first. You can then try other tips later. It is best to do one at a time. That way you will be able to see if it works. It will also stop you from feeling overwhelmed. It can be hard to make lots of changes at once.

“Self-compassion has a proven positive effect on mental wellbeing.”



Treat it

Looking at fact and opinion

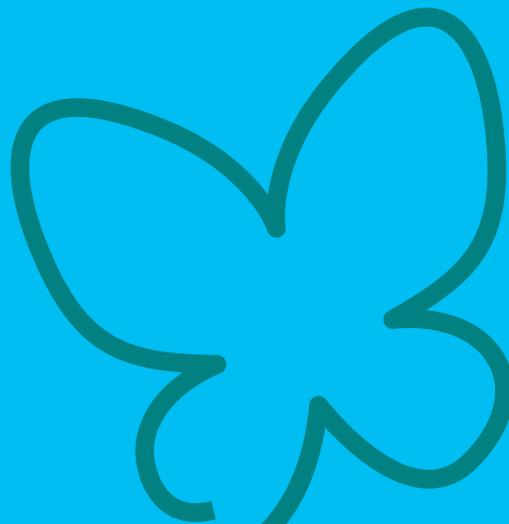
When you feel low, it is easy to think that your thoughts are facts. It is also easy to accept other people's views and opinions as facts. Often what we think is a fact is really just an opinion.

This means that it might not be true. When you know a thought is not true, you can reject it.

Your emotions affect how strongly you believe opinions too. Your emotions can also back up your own opinions. Your opinions also strengthen your emotions. They make them feel like fact. This can end up being a vicious cycle.

What can you say about this butterfly? The facts are that it has wings and it flies. Different species of butterflies have patterned wings in varying colours.

Some people love butterflies and think they are beautiful, whereas other people are afraid of them and think they are scary. These are opinions. They can vary from one person to another because opinions are not the same as facts. Not everyone is going to have the same view as you and you do not have to accept an opinion. Instead, you can reject it.



Chris's situation

Chris is walking home down the high street when his friend Russell walks past him without saying 'Hello'.

Straight away Chris thinks:

- 'He's ignored me on purpose'
- 'He doesn't like me'
- 'He's being really rude'

Chris starts to feel upset and angry. By the time he gets home, he is in an awful mood.

Chris's thoughts are all opinion. The only fact is that Russell walked past him. There could be many reasons why Russell did not say 'Hello'.

Chris needs to learn how to challenge his thoughts, by realising his thoughts are just an opinion he will be less likely to get upset in a similar situation.

Let's see how Chris challenges his unhelpful thoughts:

What is the unhelpful thought?

'Russell has ignored me on purpose'

Is my thought opinion or fact?

'Opinion'

What type of unhelpful thinking am I doing?

'I am jumping to conclusions: mind reading'

Is there another way of seeing this?

'He might not have seen me'

What would I say to a friend who thought this?

'Russell is a good friend, he might have been lost in thought. He probably did not see you'

What are the chances that my first thought was true?

'Low'

What is a more realistic thought?

'Russell must not have seen me. I wonder if he is okay'

You can dismiss your unhelpful thought. You know it is not true. You can replace it with a better one.

Challenge unhelpful thinking

Often the best way to see if a thought is true is by challenging your expectations and beliefs.

You can do that by thinking about what might happen if it were true. You can then test it out and see what happens.

Let's have a look at Chris again...

Chris has looked at his first thought about Russell. However, he still feels unsure of himself. He uses the next set of questions to help him check out his belief a bit more. He will also check out what he expects to happen.

In the table on the next page you will see the questions that Chris will ask himself to help challenge his beliefs.

It might help you to make a note of these questions so that you can also ask them in the future, when you feel stuck with a certain thought or are worried about what might happen in a situation.

By doing the questions you can calm yourself down when needed. They can help you to develop a more balanced way of thinking.



Chris's situation

What is my belief?

'People who ignore me are being rude on purpose. It is because they do not like me'

What do I expect to happen if it were true?

'They would ignore me every time I saw them. Russell will be rude to me when we meet up next'

How can I test this out?

'I'm going out bowling next week so I could see how Russell is then'

What is the worst that could happen?

'Russell could tell me that he doesn't like me. I'll make a fool of myself'

What could I do to cope if the worst did happen?

'If Russell doesn't like me then I need to think about my friends that do. If he starts to be nasty, I can get up and walk away'

What is the best that could happen?

'Russell tells me that he thinks I'm great and he values my friendship'

What is most likely to happen?

'We're going to get along okay and have a good night out. Russell will probably tell me that I'm being daft'

How does it affect me when I expect the worst?

'It makes me feel bad about myself. I feel like I'm alone and that no one cares. I feel sick and get a knotted stomach'

Are there any positives that I might be missing?

'I have some very good friends. I know they like me because they are there when I need them'

How else could I see the situation?

'Even if Russell doesn't like me, it isn't the end of the world. I have other friends who do. Russell probably didn't see me the other day'

What really happened?

'Russell was fine with me. I asked him if things were okay. He is worried about his brother. He just didn't notice me the other day'

“Life is like a roller coaster. We all have highs and lows. This is just part of daily life.”



Build yourself up

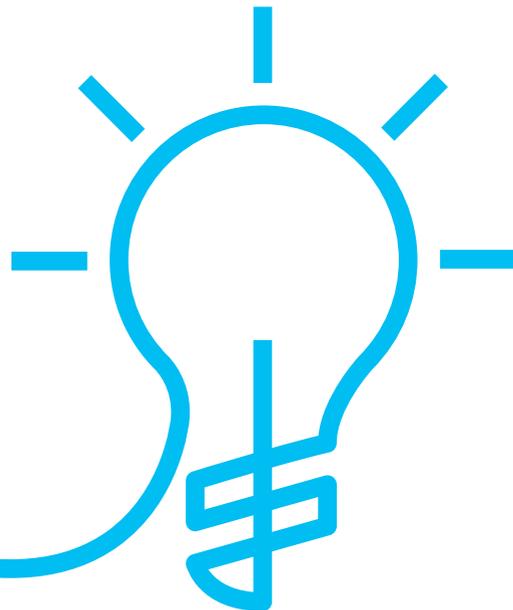
See your positive side

Think about all your good points. List your strengths, talents and successes. Ask someone you trust to give you ideas if you get stuck. Set aside some time each day to do this activity.

You could use your notepad to jot things down, or the 'Your ideas' section at the back of this guide. When someone gives you a compliment, write it down. This will stop you from forgetting it. You can then add it to your list.

If you are stuck, have a go at these questions:

- What have I achieved?
- What do I like about me?
- What are my positive features?
- What skills and talents do I have?
- What tough times have I coped with?
- What do others say they like about me?
- What traits do I like in other people that I can see in myself?
- If I met someone like me, what would I like about him or her?



Below is a list of traits - do you recognise any of them in yourself?

- Considerate
- Good listener
- Patient
- Polite
- Responsible
- Determined
- Good with cars
- Likes having a giggle
- Reads a lot
- Reliable
- Funny
- Friendly
- Organised
- Loves animals
- House proud
- Good cook
- Loving
- Hard working
- Helpful
- Adventurous
- Creative
- Active
- Individual
- Loyal
- Good friend
- Giving

Build yourself up

Keep a journal

You now have a list of your positive traits. Next, it is helpful to see when you use them. This will make them more real. This will give you more confidence to believe in your good points. Set aside some quiet time to focus on this task. It is important to give yourself time to focus and think.

Looking at the past

Choose one of your positive traits. Write down some examples of when you have shown them in the past. Do this for each of your traits. It might take some time, but it is time well spent. You are worth it.

This is the start of Chris's list:

Trait
Organised

Examples

I make sure that I have stuff in for breakfast so I don't have to rush in the morning

I planned for my interview and got there on time

Looking at now

Each day try to write three things you did that day that show your positive traits. Do this every day. It will remind you that you use your positive traits all the time.

This is Chris's example:

Date	What I did	Positive Trait
29/02/2016	Helped a colleague with some work Finished a project Did the washing-up	Helpful Hard working Organised



Be your own best friend

Compassion is part of human nature. We care for our friends. We support them when they are down. We offer them compassion. However, many of us find it hard to do the same for ourselves.

Being kind to yourself is not always easy. You may feel that giving yourself a hard time is the only way to get yourself going sometimes.

It takes time to get used to being kinder to yourself. Every time you practise self-compassion, the brain rewires itself. Self-compassion has a proven positive effect on mental wellbeing. It can help you feel happier, more hopeful and combat anxiety and depression. It can also make it easier for you to relate to others allowing you to be able to forgive people for their mistakes and feel accepted.

This is how it could be for Chris...

1. Being your own worst enemy

'Russell is so rude. He must hate me. I am so stupid for thinking that he liked me.'

This makes Chris feel under threat. His body goes into a reactive mode.

2. Being your own best friend

'It is upsetting when I feel ignored. I'm sure everyone feels like this at times. I wonder if Russell saw me. We usually get on well.'

This makes Chris feel supported and cared for. His body goes into a responsive mode.

Compassion is a great way for you to help support yourself through tough times. There are three parts to being self-compassionate:

1. Accept that this is a moment of suffering

We feel distress because life can be hard. You may feel awful now, but that will pass. Use relaxation to calm yourself. (The 'From Distress to De-stress' guide has ideas about how you can do this.)

Use self-talk to be aware of your suffering in that moment. 'This is upsetting. I feel like nobody really likes me.'

2. Accept that humans are imperfect and we all suffer

Bad things happen to all of us. We all go through hard times. No one is perfect. It is human nature to mess up at times. 'Other people worry about what others think of them. I'm not the only one.'

3. Express kindness and compassion towards yourself

Give yourself the green light to be kind to you. Talk to yourself in a soothing way. Use any phrase that can help you feel supported and safe. 'I am doing the best I can. Feeling like this does not make me a bad person.' It can be a struggle to do this at first. Try to think what you would say to a close friend going through the same thing. You could also think about what your friends might say to you.

Humans respond to warmth and gentle touch. It can help to do an action that helps you feel soothed. You could place your hands over your heart or cradle your head.

Treat yourself with kindness. Ask yourself what useful steps you could do that would be soothing. It might be having a cup of tea, or a relaxing bath.

You can find more ideas on www.mhim.org.uk

Fake it until you make it

It can be hard to change the way you think. Sometimes it is easier to change what you do.

This in turn can improve the way you think about yourself. So, what you need to do is to start to behave as if you have good self-esteem.

Fake it until you make it!

Act the part

Your body language says a lot about you. People read it often without thinking. It reflects your mood and reflects how confident you feel. With a little practice, you can use these tips to appear confident and capable so no-one will be able to tell what is going on in your head.

This is what good body language looks like. You could practise this in front of a mirror:

- Good eye contact – long enough to see what colour eyes a person has
- Avoid hands in pockets or crossed arms
- Stand up straight with shoulders back
- Head up and face forward
- Talk with your hands
- Widen your stance
- Lower your voice
- Firm handshake
- Look good
- Smile

Plan of action

The first step to change is to see how things are for you now. Keep a diary and record what you get up to over a week. After you have done an activity, score it for pleasure and achievement.

Give it a mark between 0 and 10 (0 = none to 10 = lots).

As you keep your diary, you will be able to see what you have achieved each day. You will also be able to see how much fun and enjoyable stuff you do.

Once the week has finished, take a look at your diary and see what you might like to change going forward.

Ask yourself:

- Do you need more pleasure?
- How could you treat yourself?
- What fun things could you add?
- How can you be kinder to yourself?
- Are there things that you need to do but are avoiding?
- Are you pushing yourself the right amount? (not too much, but enough)

The next step is to plan what you are going to do over the next week. Use your diary to help you plan a range of things.

Include things that:

- Are pleasurable
- Are social
- Are physical
- Give you a sense of achievement
- Have to be done

Give each activity a score, just as you did before. Aim for a balance over the week.



Be good to yourself

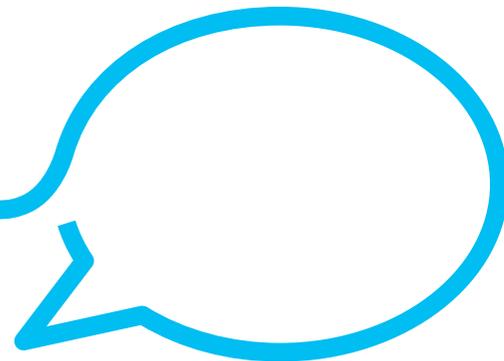
It can be hard to be good to yourself when you don't feel great. It can affect what you think you deserve.

Part of building healthy self-esteem is being good to yourself. This can be a struggle at first. Start by making a list of things that you would like to do. Include activities that you enjoy, that are relaxing or that are a treat. Think about things that you have always wanted to do but haven't yet. Don't limit yourself, write anything down even if it seems crazy. Think of big and small things you could do. There is a list on the next page to give you some ideas.

This is Chris's list:

- Eat a chocolate éclair
- Open a bottle of wine and watch a movie
- Go to a car show
- Go window-shopping for a Porsche
- Have a soak in the bath
- Find out about bungee jumping
- Play football with my mates once a week
- Go to bed before midnight on a weekday
- Take time to learn about relaxation

Now you have a list of things you would like to do. When you think of something new, add it to the list. Make plans to do the things on your list. Aim to do at least one thing for yourself every day.



Things that feel good:

1. Have a relaxing bath
2. Go for a walk
3. Go to a movie
4. Plan your career
5. Laugh
6. Cook a nice meal
7. Have a family meal
8. Go for a picnic
9. Have a quiet night in
10. Have a duvet day
11. Bake a cake
12. Have a spa day
13. Doodle
14. Plan a party
15. Go to a sports match
16. Talk to family
17. Say 'I love you'
18. Dress up
19. Sex
20. Have a lie in
21. Relax
22. Join a club
23. Learn a new skill
24. Go to the theatre
25. Go for a coffee
26. Watch a comedy series
27. Fly kites
28. Walk the dog
29. Flower arranging
30. Look after your pets
31. Play football
32. Chat to friends
33. Make a 'to do' list
34. Go swimming
35. Go bird watching
36. Play the piano
37. Listen to music
38. Buy new clothes
39. Read a novel
40. Go sightseeing
41. Clean the house
42. Join a choir
43. Compliment someone
44. Take care of plants
45. Do some DIY
46. Play golf
47. Go to the beach
48. Pray
49. Meditate
50. Go for a drive
51. Listen to an audio book
52. Use social media
53. Masturbate
54. Make a gift
55. Give a gift
56. Learn self-defence
57. Meet new people
58. Listen to others
59. Watch a film
60. Do a crossword
61. Star gaze
62. Spend time alone
63. Play board games
64. Surf the internet
65. Go dancing
66. Shoot pool
67. Knit
68. Kiss a loved one
69. Go to the library
70. Listen to the radio
71. Hug someone
72. Have a sauna
73. Photography
74. Keep a journal

Treat yourself well

You can treat yourself well in many ways. The skill of 'looking after you' and being aware of your needs is important.

Some people feel guilty when they take care of their own needs. But, taking care of yourself is a good thing. You will be better able to deal with the ups and downs that life will throw at you. You will also be more able to support others when you feel strong and well rested.

Treat yourself

Take time out. Enjoy being yourself and do something just for you. It might be having a bubble bath or going to watch a film.

Connect

Build bonds with people. It can help you feel supported. It can also allow you to feel closer to others. People have always lived in groups. Having a good set of friends and family can improve your wellbeing.

Eat well

Your brain uses up more than 50% of the energy in the food you eat. That is why it is important to eat starchy food like rice, pasta, bread and potatoes. When you do not eat well, your brain cannot work properly. Eating your five-a-day helps improve physical and mental health. It includes fresh, frozen, canned or dried fruit and vegetables. It is also important to eat protein such as meat, fish, beans, tofu and Quorn. Omega 3 oils found in oily fish and dark green vegetables are vital for a healthy brain. So is drinking enough liquid each day. The guide 'Food and Mood' has more information. You can download a free copy from www.mhim.org.uk

Vitamin D

There is very little Vitamin D in the food we eat. Our skin makes Vitamin D from sunlight. However, this only happens between the months of March and October. You only need to spend 20 minutes in the sun each day, if you have pale skin. If you have a darker skin tone you may need to spend longer in the sun. Many breakfast cereals and all margarines (but not low fat spreads) have Vitamin D added to them. Just check out the label. You can also buy Vitamin D tablets to take once a day.

Sleep well

Sleep lets the body and mind recuperate and rest. When you don't sleep well, your brain doesn't work properly. You can use relaxation and breathing techniques in bed to help you to fall asleep. Read the guide 'Sleep Well' for more information. You can download a free copy from www.mhim.org.uk

Talk to someone you really trust

Just talking about what is stressing you out can make you feel better.

Be active

Being active can make you feel fitter and more confident. It is also good for reducing stress. Choose something that you enjoy and can fit into your lifestyle. Aim to do 30 minutes of activity at least five times a week. Walking, gardening and doing the housework are all examples of physical activity. The guide 'Physical Activity and Mood' has even more tips about getting started. You can download a free copy from www.mhim.org.uk

Take one thing at a time

Things can sometimes feel overwhelming. Decide what is most important. Then tackle the most essential job first.

Give

This is about doing something nice for others. Helping someone else can make you feel good about yourself. It will make other people feel good too. It could be as simple as smiling at a stranger or holding a door open for someone. You could help a neighbour or friend. You could even do random acts of kindness. It can feel great to volunteer at a local community group or charity. You could meet new people, learn new skills and gain valuable experience.

Distract yourself

Having something else to focus on helps to lessen stress. So, you could try out a new hobby!

Keep learning

Your brain needs exercise too. So, learn or rediscover skills. It builds confidence and self-esteem. You will feel more able to cope with life.

Take notice

Notice the world around you. It can put things in perspective and brighten your day. Often we can go around in autopilot and miss the little things that could improve our mood. Keep an eye out for rainbows, architecture and nature!

Relax

This helps the body and mind recover and rest. You can relax in many ways. Some people read; others paint and draw; some people knit and others spend time with animals. Try to find a way that works for you. Breathing skills can reduce the affect of stress on the body. Read the guide 'From Distress to De-stress' for more information. You can download a free copy from www.mhim.org.uk

Be creative

Express yourself in some way. You could try painting, writing or dancing.

Take time out to play

Having fun is a great way to reduce stress. Enjoying time with your friends helps you feel good. You could play on a games console or have a go on the swings at the park.

Avoid self-medication

They may make you feel a bit better or numb the pain for a while. However, using drugs or alcohol can often become an extra problem.

Ask for help if you need it

Don't be ashamed to ask for emotional or practical help and support when you need it. We all need help sometimes. Seeking help early can prevent problems getting worse. It's a sign of strength, not weakness.

Beat it

Practice, practice, practice...

Things are not going to change overnight. It can be a challenge to make changes to the way you have been doing things for so long. But, with practice it will become easier and easier. In the end, the changes will feel like second nature as you get used to them.

There is a lot of information in this guide. It might be useful to read it more than once. Try each technique a few times and keep practising the ones that you find useful.

Do not expect too much too soon. It may take some time for you to change the way you think and feel. It is a bit like learning to walk as a toddler. We all fall over at first. You might even bang your head or graze your knee. Luckily, despite these setbacks, you kept going and eventually learnt to walk. It didn't happen overnight. It took time and practice. It is the same for overcoming low self-esteem. It is not going to happen straight away. But, it will be worth it in the end.

After a while, it is useful to go back and check your checklists. You will be able to see if there have been any changes.

Coping with setbacks

Everyone has setbacks. Life is like that! The trick is to find ways to cope with them. When they do occur, remember that it happens to everyone. It does not mean that you have failed, so it is important not to give yourself a hard time. If you do start to think things like 'I'm a failure', you can use the 'Challenge unhelpful thinking' section of this guide on page 32 to help change the way you think.

When you have a setback, try to remember that you are not back to square one. It can be easy to forget about all the progress you have already made. Try to use it as a learning experience. We often learn more from things when they don't go quite right compared to when they go smoothly. Take some time to reflect on what has happened. Try to understand why it has happened and what you can learn from it. You may be able to find a pattern to what is going on.

Finally – don't give up! Overcoming low self-esteem takes time and practice. It may take a while to notice some improvements. It is worth taking some time each month to look at the progress you have made.

