Self-esteem

Information for children and young people and their parents and carers

How can I improve my self-esteem?

- Be kind to yourself
- Look after yourself
- Try to notice the good things
- Build a support network
- Learn to be assertive
- Talking and art therapies
- Set yourself a challenge
- Find support for connected issues

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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 sometimes feel really difficult to change.

Your self-esteem can affect whether you:

- Like and value yourself as a person
- Are able to make decisions and assert yourself
- Recognise your strengths and positive attributes
- 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

What can cause low self-esteem?

The things that affect our self-esteem differ for everyone. Your self-esteem might change suddenly, or you might have had low self-esteem for a while – which might make it hard to recognise how you feel and make changes.

Difficult or stressful life experiences can often be a factor, such as:

- Being bullied or abused
- Experiencing prejudice, discrimination or stigma
- Struggling with your school or college work
- Family problems
- Ongoing stress
- Physical health problems
- Mental health problems
- Relationship problems
- Worries about your appearance and body image

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.

Is low self-esteem a mental health problem?

Having low self-esteem isn't a mental health problem in itself, but they are closely linked. If lots of things affect your self-esteem for along time, this might lead to mental health problems such as depression or anxiety.

Some of the experiences of low self-esteem can be signs of a mental health problem, particularly 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. See our information on mental health problems and seeking help for a mental health problem for more on these topics.