

Building self-confidence

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Gymnast Simone Biles performs a confident floor routine at the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Thursday, August 11, 2016. Photo by: AP Photo/Dmitri Lovetsky

How many times have you hesitated or kept quiet when you knew the answer to a question? Then how did it feel when somebody else gave the right answer and received praise?

It's not unusual for teens to avoid answering questions in front of others because they're afraid of being wrong. It might help to know that many famous thinkers have suffered from this fear.

Sometimes a lack of self-confidence stems merely from a lack of experience.

You may not feel so confident about answering questions out loud if it isn't something you do very often. You might also feel nervous about taking a test or acting in a play for the first time. These feelings will change as you grow and experience more things in life.

Sometimes, however, a lack of self-confidence can come from feelings of insecurity. Sometimes we have negative feelings about ourselves and we bury them deep inside. When we do this, we tend to avoid taking chances.

If your lack of self-confidence comes from negative feelings you have about yourself, you are experiencing something perfectly normal and common. Many people feel insecure from time to time, and it is something that you can and should change.

Identify The Cause Of Your Lack Of Self-Confidence

If you have a fear that people will see your perceived weakness, you will find it difficult to assert yourself. There are many reasons why you might feel badly about yourself. It might have to do with your looks, your size or your perceived intelligence. It may have to do with your past or your family experience.

In building self-confidence, your first goal is to develop a realistic understanding of your strengths and weaknesses. You'll have to look inside yourself to discover where and why you feel vulnerable.

Face Your Fear Head-On

To get started on your self-exploration, go to a quiet and comfortable place and think about the things that make you feel bad about yourself. Once you have identified these things, you'll need to determine what you can do to change them. Perhaps you feel like you could have a healthier lifestyle. Should you change your eating habits or start exercising more? Maybe you don't feel up to speed in one of your classes. Could you read a book about that subject? Any action you take — even the act of thinking about your problem — is a step toward getting it out in the open and eventually healing.

Celebrate Your Strengths

It's not enough to identify your weaknesses or your problem areas. You also have great parts of yourself that you need to explore. You can start doing this by making a big list of things you have accomplished and the things you do well.

Do you always make people laugh? Can you organize things or navigate well? Are you especially good at drawing pictures, solving problems or remembering names?

These are all valuable skills that are useful at school and in extracurricular activities you enjoy. These skills will also serve you later on in college and on the job. You probably have many valuable traits waiting to be identified.

Once you have taken the two steps above, identifying your vulnerabilities and identifying your strengths, you will start feeling more confident. You decrease your anxiety by facing your fears. You start liking yourself better and feeling more confident when you celebrate your natural strengths.

Change Your Behavior

Psychologists are experts on how people think and feel. They say that we can change our feelings by changing our behavior. For instance, some studies have shown that we become happier if we walk around with a smile on our faces.

You can speed up your path to increased self-confidence by changing your behavior.

For example, if you smile more, it will help you fight off feelings of negativity.

If you compliment others on their strengths, you'll find that other people will return the favor and compliment you back. We all like to hear good things about ourselves.

Use A Third-Person Approach

There is an interesting study that shows that there may be a trick to meeting our behavioral goals more quickly. The trick is thinking about yourself in the third person as you evaluate your progress. That means thinking about yourself as if you were talking about someone else.

The study measured the progress in two groups of people who were attempting to make a positive change in their lives. The people in the first group were encouraged to think about their progress in the first person, talking about themselves using "I." The people in the second group were encouraged to think about their progress from an outsider's point of view, using "he" or "she," referring to themselves by their name as another person would.

Interestingly, those who thought about themselves in the third person enjoyed a faster path to improvement.

As you go through the process of improving your self-image and self-confidence, try to think of yourself as a separate person. Picture yourself as a stranger who is on a path toward positive change.

Be sure to celebrate this person's accomplishments.

Quiz

1 Read the paragraph from the introduction [paragraphs 1-6].

Sometimes, however, a lack of self-confidence can come from feelings of insecurity. Sometimes we have negative feelings about ourselves and we bury them deep inside. When we do this, we tend to avoid taking chances.

What does the author MOST LIKELY want the reader to believe about insecurity based on this introduction?

- (A) Insecurity is best avoided by burying negative feelings deep inside.
- (B) Insecurity is something we need to change in order to take chances.
- (C) Insecurity is not a good reason for lacking self-confidence.
- (D) Insecurity is something very few people actually experience.

2 Which of the following MOST influenced people's ability to improve their confidence quickly?

- (A) identifying feelings of vulnerability
- (B) smiling as often as possible
- (C) complimenting others on strengths
- (D) using a third-person perspective

3 What is the author's MAIN reason for including information about qualities that make people feel insecure or vulnerable?

- (A) to argue that confident people avoid worrying about these things
- (B) to explore which of these things you can begin changing first
- (C) to suggest it is important to get these things out in the open
- (D) to demonstrate most people worry about the same things

4 How does the author convey the importance of identifying personal strengths in the article?

- (A) by showing that confident people have a larger number of strengths
- (B) by emphasizing the value of basic life skills toward building confidence
- (C) by offering evidence that confident thinkers write down their strengths
- (D) by highlighting how friendships develop greater feelings of confidence

Answer Key

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