Safeguarding
and Wellbeing

A GUIDE TO SELF-ESTEEM

Start reading...

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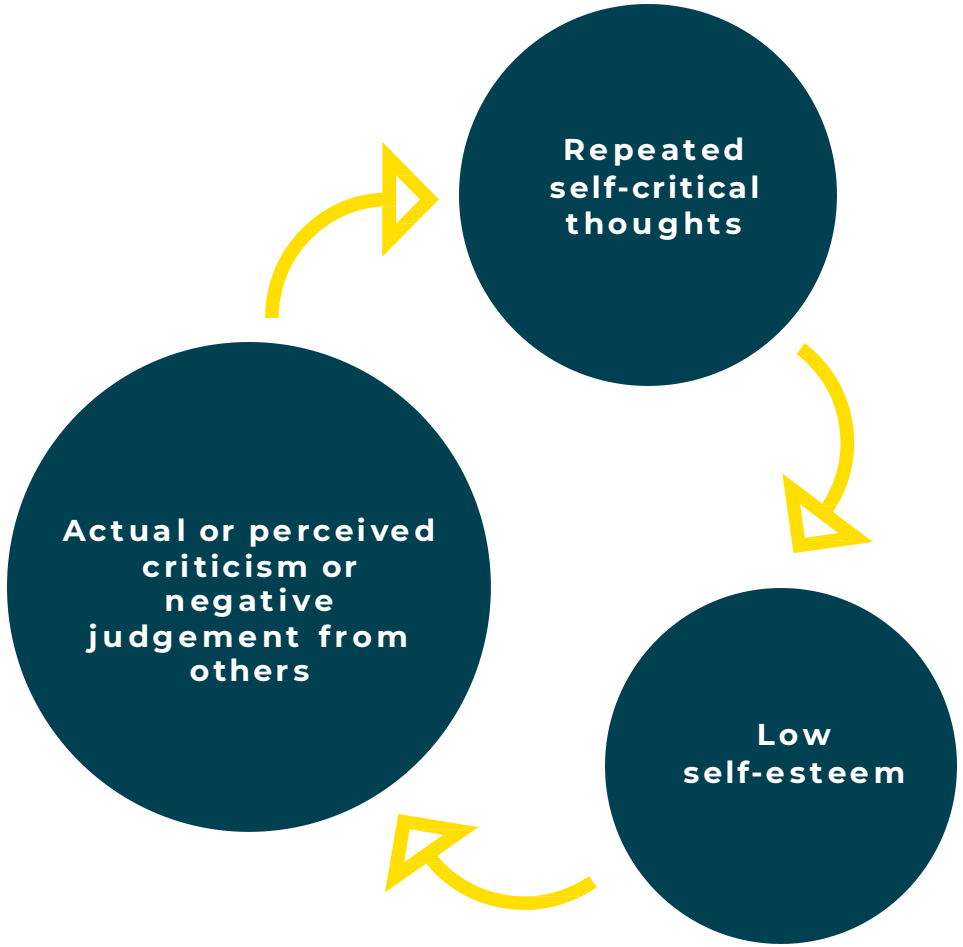
Self-esteem refers to how much value we place on ourselves, and this can differ greatly between individuals. While we may view ourselves quite negatively, others may see us in a far more positive light. However, if we develop a pattern of comparing ourselves to others or being overly self-critical, this can lead to low self-esteem and a reduced sense of self-worth.

Low self-esteem can develop from difficult or negative life experiences, especially in childhood when we are more vulnerable. This might include being criticised, judged harshly, or experiencing bullying. As adults, factors such as unhealthy relationships or highly stressful life events can also contribute to low self-esteem.

Low self-esteem can persist over time, often reinforced by negative self-talk. These self-critical thoughts can be triggered by actual criticism or even the belief that we are being criticised, even when that is not the case.



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How low self-esteem affects us

Emotions

- Depressed
- Hurt
- Angry
- Frustrated
- Anxious
- Guilty
- Stressed

Thoughts

- Negative, self-critical: I'm so stupid, I'm worthless, it's my fault, I'm a failure, I'm not good enough
- An unhelpful thinking habit occurs when we give more importance to negative thought patterns and become stuck in them'

Behaviour

- Try to please others
- Defensiveness
- What common emotions, behaviours, and thoughts are associated with low self-esteem
- Shy and passive around others
- Avoid situations and people
- Neglect or abuse ourselves

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The Poisoned parrot

Imagine you're given a parrot.
This parrot is just a parrot - it doesn't have any knowledge, wisdom or insight - it's bird-brained after all.
It recites thinkings 'parrot-fashion'
- without any understanding or comprehension. It's a parrot.

However, this particular parrot is a poisoned and poisonous parrot.
It's been specifically trained to be unhelpful to you, continuously commenting on you and your life, in a way
that constantly puts you down, criticising you. For example,
the bus gets stuck in a traffic jam, and you arrive at work 5 minutes late. The parrot sits there saying, 'there you go again. Late. You just can't manage to get there on time can you? So stupid. If you'd left the house and got the earlier bus, you'd
have arrived with loads of time to spare and the boss would be happy. But you?
No way. Just can't do it. Useless. Waste of space. Absolutely pathetic!'

How long would you put up with this abuse before throwing a towel over the cage, or getting rid of the parrot? We can often put up with the thoughts from this internal bully for far too long.

We can learn to use the antidote: Notice that 'parrot' - and cover the cage. 'There's that parrot again - I don't have to listen to it' and go and do something else.
Put your focus of attention elsewhere. Be persistent in your practice! Eventually this poisoned parrot will tire of the towel, tire of you not responding. You'll notice
it less and less. It might just give up its poison as your antidote overcomes it or perhaps fly off to wherever poisoned parrots go.

Vivyan 2008 - adapted from 'The Malevolent Parrot' by Kristina Ivings

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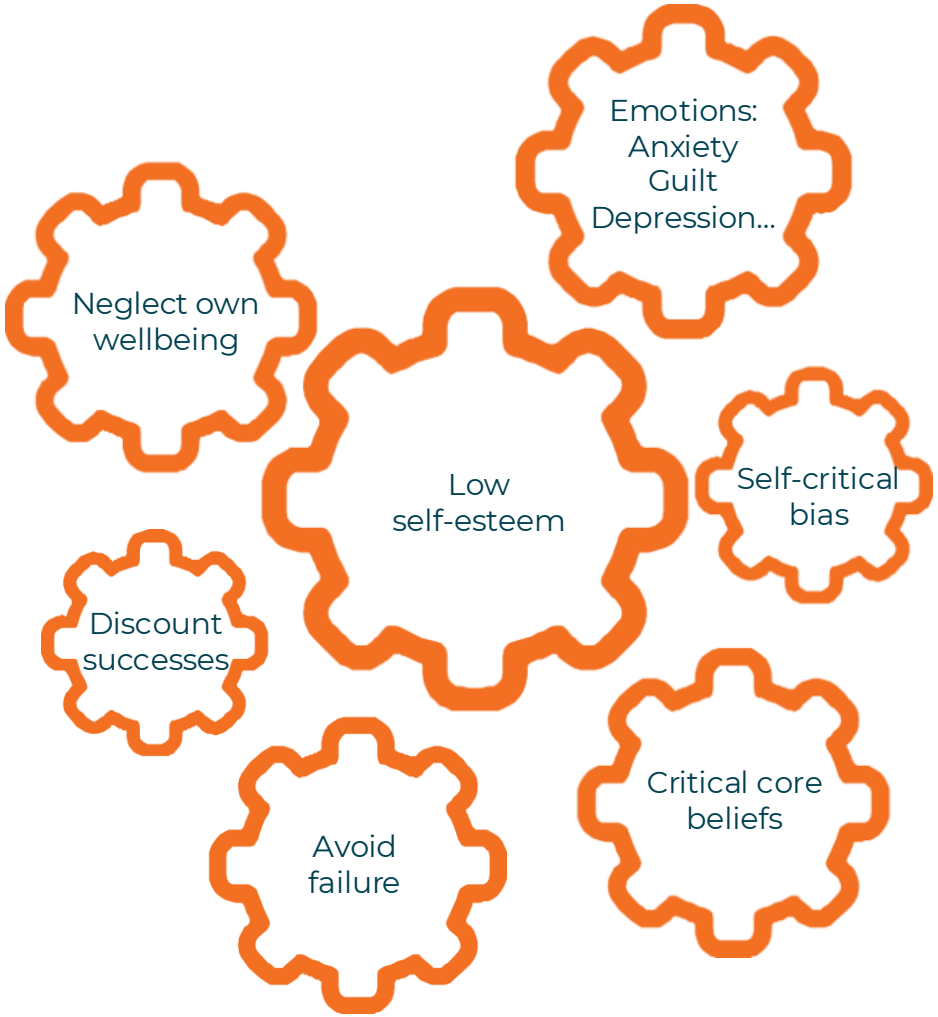
Identify the factors that help keep the problem going

Use the cogs diagram to help you identify what contributes to your low self-esteem. Look at each factor and try to make changes in each.

Example of vicious cogs of low self-esteem.



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Doing things differently

- Communicate with others assertively
- Set achievable and realistic goals. When you achieve them, congratulate and treat yourself, and allow others to congratulate you
- Accept compliments - say thank you, and smile
- Visualise positive change
- Look after yourself - eat healthily, exercise, do more things you enjoy doing
- Stand, walk and talk confidently
- Take up Mindfulness
- Take up a new hobby or interest
- Learn a new skill
- Overcome avoidance
- Reward yourself for achievements and successes – however small
- Thank others - show your appreciation, and others will appreciate you
- Problem solve
- Do things for others - help someone out. It makes us feel better about ourselves. Set limits and agree what you will and won't do
- Write a compassionate letter to yourself

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Acknowledge your strengths - start by writing out a list of things you're good at, or what others have or do say about you.

- Build a compassionate image
- Notice the positives - carry a notepad around, and write down whenever you notice something good or helpful that you've said, or done, or what others have said about you
- At the end of each day, ask yourself: What have I done or tried today that I've never done or tried before? What have I done to help other people today? Who has helped me? What have I enjoyed doing today?

Be compassionate with yourself - just as you might be with someone else

- What would a caring friend say to me in this situation?
- What is a kind and constructive way to think about how I can improve this situation?
- Whoever said human beings are supposed to be perfect?
- Would a caring mother say this to her child if she wanted the child to grow and develop?
- How will I learn if it's not okay to make mistakes?

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Think differently

- STOP! Pause, take a breath...
- Ask yourself: What am I reacting to? What have I been thinking about here?
- Is this thought: fact or opinion?
- Is that “Internal Critic” operating again?
- There’s that parrot again! I don’t have to listen to it.
- Thoughts are just thoughts!
- Am I taking things out of proportion?
- How important is this really? How important will it be in 6 months’ time?
- Am I expecting something from myself that is unrealistic?
- What’s the worst (and best) that could happen? What’s most likely to happen?
- Am I using that negative filter? Those gloomy specs? Is there another way of looking at it?
- What would I think about someone else in this situation? What would I say to a friend?
- Am I spending time ruminating about the past or worrying about the future? What could I do right now that would help me feel better?
- Am I putting more pressure on myself, setting up expectations of myself that are almost impossible? What would be more realistic?
- Am I jumping to conclusions about what this person meant? Am I mis-reading between the lines? Is it possible that they didn’t mean that?
- This is just a reminder of the past. That was then, and this is now. Even though this memory makes me feel upset, it’s not actually happening again right now.
- What would be the consequences of doing what I normally do?
- Is there another way of dealing with this? What would be the most helpful and effective action to take? (for me, for the situation, for the other person)
- What do I want or need from this person or situation? What do they want or need from me? Is there a compromise? How could I act in a way that was more effective or helpful?
- Am I just focusing on the worst possible thing that could happen? What would be more realistic?
- Am I focusing on the negative, putting myself down? What would be more realistic?
- Is there another way of looking at this?
- Am I exaggerating the good aspects of others, and putting myself down? Or am I exaggerating the negative and minimising the positives? How would someone else see it? What’s the bigger picture or the helicopter view?
- Things aren’t either totally white or totally black - there are shades of grey. Where is this on the spectrum?