

**NO SELF-ESTEEM  
REQUIRED**



How often do you hear the term, “self-esteem”? The concept of self-esteem has become a part of our culture and everyday language. This term, used in popular psychology and education, needs to be understood before it is used. Once you understand the term “self-esteem”, you may not want to use it at all. Here is a brief history of the concept.

## History of Self-Esteem

William James in 1890 stated that we feel good about ourselves when our **performance is high and our expectations are low**. This is one of the first times a psychologist made reference to the idea of a person feeling good about himself. Based on his definition, if you do not expect to do well in a tennis game, but you end up winning, you will feel good about yourself.

Feeling good was quite common in the United States of America in the early 1900’s. The 20th century started with great optimism and prosperity for many Americans and new immigrants to the country. Then came World War-I, the Great Depression, and World War-II. Suddenly, people did not feel good. Everywhere people were afraid, anxious, and discouraged.

Around 1950, the optimism that led to popular sayings such as “*accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative*” was on the decline. Optimism seemed to ignore the realities of racism, poverty, and oppression that would not go away just by putting on blinders or being positive. Optimism was only for the people who were not actually suffering from social evils.

**The man who does not value himself, cannot value anything or anyone.**

— Ayn Rand, *The Value of Selfishness: A New Concept of Egoism*.

Then in 1950 the psychologist B. F. Skinner made an astounding claim, “*You give me any child, and I can make anything out of him.*” The determinism of genetics and sexual drives suggested by Darwin and Freud was completely unacceptable to Skinner and radical behaviorism. B. F. Skinner went from being unknown to becoming a hero of the 20th century overnight. He championed the cause that parents, schools, prisons, and the government can shape people to become anyone we want them to be.

**When man rejects reason as his standard of judgement, only one alternative standard remains to him: his feelings.**

— Nathaniel Branden

During the 1960's US president J. F. Kennedy and the civil rights leader Martin Luther King were killed, the government appeared corrupt, and the Vietnam War was getting worse. Also during this time, very few white Christians spoke out against the rampant racism and social injustice, or reached out to the needs of the poor. The church kept itself separate from the problems of the world. Once again, skepticism and pessimism began to gain ground throughout the United States.

During the 1960's, in the face of a pessimistic, meaningless world, individualism reigned. People gave up the belief in the good of the government, the good of the church, or the good of the family. The birth control pill was mass-produced specifically so that people could have “*free sex*”. Sex became about pleasure, not family. The attitude of the 1960's was that people were not going to listen to anyone who claimed to be an authority anymore. The belief of the 1960's was simply stated, “*We are not controlled by biology, by our drives, the government, or by God. We have individual freedom and choices to make ourselves happy anyway we want.*”

***“We have only faith to believe we are important, because of the greater difficulty of believing we are not.”***

~ Thomas Harris, MD

# The Feel Good Movement

It was during this self-focused time that Nathaniel Brandon (partner of Ayn Rand) started the idea that **everyone has the right to feel good**. He said that people do bad things because they don't feel good about themselves. If people feel good, they will do good. Self-esteem quickly swept the entire USA and spread to Europe. Most states within the USA now make this mandatory in the education of children. People need to appreciate their own self-worth and importance. In the 1960's the importance of **achievement** was replaced with the twin goals of **self-esteem** and **happiness**.

The impact on education of the self-esteem movement has been profound. Some sports leagues eliminated keeping score of youth athletic events in order to protect children's self-esteem. Everyone gets a medal! Schools and the government push teachers to have all children be viewed as equally successful. This has resulted in the need for teaching material to be focused toward the lowest functioning children in the classroom. The goal is that no child will be left behind; everyone will be successful.

## Basis Principles of Self-Esteem

The self-esteem movement suggests that you are valuable because you are special. If you believe this, you will have self-esteem. The reason you are special is that you are unique and wonderful, just like everyone else. If you tell yourself this enough times, then it will transform how you feel about yourself, which in turn will cause you to feel happy and do good things. It is important to eliminate all negative thinking about yourself.

There is no reason given why a person is special, wonderful, or unique. It is just something that must be believed and accepted. It is taught that a person must repeat the positive statements many times over in order to make them true. When it is truly believed, then they will feel good. If they don't believe this, they will feel bad and do what is bad. Of course, no definition is given about what good or bad mean.

What have studies by psychologists shown about school systems, mental health treatment programs, and parenting approaches that adopt the self-esteem mindset? Results have shown that self-esteem training leads to the following:

1. Self-esteem training does lead to good feelings about the self, but the people with self-esteem are **unable to cope** effectively with problems.
2. When faced with problems, people with self-esteem training quickly **become depressed and give up**.
3. People with high-esteem are **unable to see flaws** and drastically **over-estimate their abilities**.
4. People with high self-esteem feel entitled to special privileges because of inherently special status.
5. People with high self-esteem have great **difficulty working independently** and are unwilling to **assume responsibility for problems**.



Keep in mind that self-esteem is not synonymous with accepted psychology. Many psychologists have completely rejected this term and find it detrimental to helping people or understanding mental health. Self-esteem simply cannot be defined in any way that makes logical sense.

*Armies of American teachers, along with American parents, are straining to bolster children's self-esteem. That sounds innocuous enough, but the way they do it often erodes children's sense of worth. By emphasizing how a child feels, at the expense of what the child does— mastery, persistence, overcoming frustration and boredom, and meeting challenge—parents and teachers are making this generation of children more vulnerable to depression.*

*~ Martin Seligman, Ph.D., The Optimistic Child: A Proven Program to Safeguard Children Against Depression and Build Lifelong Resilience.*

# Good Character is an Alternative To Self-Esteem

We can easily fall into the trap of spending our life doing what feels good and what looks good, rather than doing what is truly good. Making moment to moment choices to do what is good, builds character and leads to a strong sense of self-worth.

Character is the action we take to carry out our ethics, morals, and values. Character is an observable, consistent pattern of behavior that represents who and we are and what we stand for. Character includes the moral qualities of integrity, faithfulness, hopefulness, love, kindness, honesty, truthfulness, mercy, compassion, patience, endurance, humility, thankfulness, and self-sacrifice. We need these qualities in increasing measure throughout life and as we do, we feel good as a result.

When we make choices, sometimes very hard choices, to do good and treat others well, we will develop good character and experience inner satisfaction. The experience of building better relationships with others, solving problems, and acting courageously to make things better not worse increases our sense of self-worth. Our sense of value comes as a result of our good relationships, the actions we take to make things better, and the choices we make to do what is good, not from self-love.

Good relationships are the foundation of our self-worth. We need from others what we cannot provide ourselves, which is a sense of belonging, acceptance and recognition. Our relationships with others are best when we do the following:

- Act with courage to do what is right, even when it costs us personally and leads to hardship and suffering.
- Make choices to make things better, face problems, and do what is best for others.
- Experience compassion from others and from ourselves for the struggles, failures, and problems we face.

Having self-worth has nothing to do with seeing myself as perfect, unselfish, or unafraid. When we are secure and have self-worth, we can look honestly at the problems we have, our capacity to do what is wrong, and the poor choices we have made throughout our life. We are far from perfect, and that is normal.



Satisfaction and positive feelings comes from doing what is right and good, even when it costs us. Knowing that we belong and that we are capable of making a difference in the world leads to emotional security, a stable identity, and good character. No self-esteem required.

Are you looking to build strong character? The key to strong character is making choices to build better relationships with others. Good relationships begin by stopping behaviors that make relationships worse. Criticism, nagging, complaining, anger, withdrawal, and giving others the cold shoulder will **always** make relationships worse. Let this one question be your guide as you relate to others, “Will what I am about to say or do strengthen my relationship with others, or make it worse?” The simple act of you behaving well can change your relationships at work, school, and home.