



Self Worth - Relationships

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Relationships and Self Worth may seem like two completely unrelated topics, but the fact is the health of your relationship can clearly reflect the condition of your self-esteem. Relationships can affect how we see and perceive ourselves and the reality around us. It's not just our romantic relationships that do this but relationships with family and friends can also affect our self-esteem.

The goal in any relationship is to feel safe, supported and respected. In intimate relationships there is also the desire to be emotionally taken care of, wanted, unconditionally accepted and loved just for existing. We want to feel part of something special and not alone. To be free to be who we are, rather than who we think we need to be for the other person. We want to experience forgiveness and being forgiven without revenge or reminders of past offenses. A healthy relationship encourages personal growth and supports individuality.

Characteristics of low Self Worth in relationships

People with low Self Worth can have major difficulties in relationships because they are unable to establish healthy boundaries or set limits with people. The reason for this inability is that with low Self Worth comes a variety of irrational thoughts, emotions and actions which leads people to lose themselves in relationships with others. This absorption of the self into another's life leads to a loss of control. People with low Self Worth may also become dependent on the will of another person.

These people can become victims of being controlled by how others think, feel about and act towards them. People with low Self Worth are dependent on others for approval and recognition and are therefore fearful of rejection and conflict with others.

According to The MindShift Foundation Clinical Psychologist Dr Lars Madsen, "The problem of low Self Worth is both an individual and a societal one, with the media portraying an unrealistic picture of how people should look, behave and relate to one another. If we are not taught to love ourselves unconditionally through building positive Self Worth by valuing ourselves, our beliefs and our unique contribution to the world then we often find ourselves in relationships that reflect our confusion and low self-worth."

People with low Self Worth can have the irrational need to have 'perfect' relationships, and as a result they are often in competition for control with their partner to make their relationship the way they think they should be. This competition results in the health of the relationship deteriorating and eventually, the partners can find themselves in a vacuous situation with deep resentment and hurts from perceived ills. The partners find that they resent each other because of the mistaken belief that



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after giving and giving and giving, they have nothing left of themselves to keep the relationship alive and well.

Relationship killers

Certain issues are relationship killers. Here are some areas where action—or inaction—can make all the difference.

1. Money. It is the number one cause of divorce. If a partner has been unscrupulous in financial matters, earning the trust back can be a challenge. You can start over but you have to be willing to make up for what was lost and tune up the business side of your relationship.
2. Sex/infidelity. Nothing rocks a person's sense of self and willingness to trust more than infidelity. This can shatter even the strongest relationship, leaving behind feelings of betrayal, guilt, and anger.
3. Disrespect. If you call your partner names, belittle him or her, threaten to leave or use insulting language, research shows that your relationship has a very low chance of survival.
4. Children. To some, children are the reason for living, but when families blend or go through difficult changes, children can become the focus of a relationship. Make sure you keep things in balance with your partner so you have the energy to deal with any child issues and still have time for yourselves.
5. Resentment. When you are holding onto pain, hurt, or anger in your heart, there is little room for love. If you are harbouring resentment over any issue, try to talk it out and put it to rest.
6. Lying. Once you have been caught in a lie or break a promise, things change—and not for the better. Even if you're afraid of 'getting in trouble', tell the whole truth and don't break any new promises you make. Find a way to make up for past mistakes.
7. Disinterest. All good relationships require work. If you are unwilling to do it your connection will diminish and you will begin to resent your partner. Talking about the kind of work your relationship needs is a good start.
8. Aggression. If you punish your partner when you don't get your way, or you give each other the silent treatment, you are headed for a lifetime of emotional pain. Stop the nastiness and learn how to heal what eats at you.



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Relationship building

When relationships become troubled, both parties must figure out what is needed to rebuild the relationship again. It isn't easy and takes hard work, but if you want to stay in your relationship, as a reward for effort, it can become one that is strong and will stand the test of time.

Commitment

The first step in rebuilding a troubled relationship is commitment. If both parties are committed to making it work, it can. However, if one party refuses to commit to the process of rebuilding the relationship then it is bound to fail. It will take both partners working hard and taking the time to make it work for success. This is a commitment that both parties need to take seriously. Whatever caused stress in the relationship in the first place is still going to be there and both parties need to be determined to make it through. It isn't enough to just assume the other person wants to be there working hard. Once both parties have made a clear commitment to working on rebuilding and repairing the relationship the real work can begin.

Communication

Most people know that communication is important for a good relationship, but few realise that it is the key to rebuilding a bad relationship. Both parties need to talk and that means talk about everything. This isn't always easy to do, especially when there are emotions involved and feelings that may have been hurt by betrayal or a lack of trust. This is something that has to continue on for a long while. It takes work to build communication each and every day. Some days it will be easy and others it will be really hard. Keep at it.

Love

Love is one of the most complicated things to understand on this planet. It is a word we use in so many ways and often it is hard to define. We can say things like, 'I love blueberry muffins', just after saying 'I love you'. It is also something that gets confused with a fluttery emotion that may feel like butterflies in the stomach. We call this sensation 'in love'. Usually, it is the 'in love' feelings that get relationships started, but over time these emotions can fade. The heart doesn't beat as fast as it once did and the sight of your partner doesn't make you go weak in the knees any longer. It is easy to feel that you have 'fallen out of love' once these emotions are gone. However, real love is much deeper than that and if you remember that real love is unconditional and way beyond such simple emotions then it will take you a long way to rebuilding your relationship and keeping it strong.

Falling 'in' Love Again.

While it's easy to be dependent upon the feel-good emotions of 'in love', it is undeniable that these emotions that make it feel good and make it easy to want to be with a person can fade. While these emotions disappear as life steps in, there are things that can be done to 'fall back in love' with a



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partner. This can be done by dating, doing things that both enjoy and spending quality time together (with and without the kids). It isn't something that will happen in a single night or even a week, but taking the time to remember what you love about the other person, about the things that brought you together and about the things you enjoyed in the early days has the ability to rekindle the flame.

Building Trust.

Trust is a hard thing to build. When a major breach of trust occurs such as cheating or lying, it takes time build that trust back up. A lack of trust between partners can cause Self Worth to plummet and sometimes, it can only take a small feeling of suspicion to feel like the other person has broken trust in some way. To build trust you will need to give it time, talk often and be aware of the feelings the other person has. Don't get upset if they need reassurance from you. It is your partner's way of trying to communicate with you.

Time.

They say time is a healer. Scars may always exist on your relationship, but if you give it time and work toward rebuilding it, you can have a better relationship than before, one that is strong and can stand the test of time. You must give it time. It could take weeks, months, or even years, but if you work hard and continue to work together to create and grow then you will rebuild the relationship.

Where to get help

Always remember you are not alone. Your doctor or registered health professionals are there to help you.

Our online resource page also has a full list of organisations where you can get further information. <http://mindshift.org.au/suggested-links/>.

Things to remember

Dr Lars Madsen suggests that, "It is always best to start with the relationship you have with yourself. If you have explored who you are and what you really need in your life, you lift the fog of confusion and self-doubt and start a journey whereby loving yourself you can attract positive relationships into your life. Always offer the qualities that you wish to receive in a relationship. If you want tenderness, be tender, if you want laughter, offer joy, if you want to be heard, listen, if you want passion, offer your desire, if you want peace, offer understanding. Little by little your partner will respond to your new way of responding and your relationship will improve."



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In Summary

Relationships quite clearly have an effect on self-esteem. In an unhealthy relationship, people will experience a lowered sense of Self Worth when they allow themselves to be controlled by their partner, have no personal boundaries or limitations and do not communicate their thoughts and feelings. Inaccurate media portrayals of the 'perfect' relationship can give people unrealistic ideas to which reality does not align. Money, infidelity, resentment, lack of respect and laziness are all things which can destroy relationships and self-esteem.

In healthy relationships, people will experience a safe, loving and supportive environment built on commitment, communication and love. High Self Worth in a relationship comes not only from a supportive partner and environment, but from within as well. As much as you can work on a relationship, you must be willing to work on yourself too.

Updates and Further information

For the latest updates and further information please visit www.mindshift.org.au.

Our Mission

It is our mission to ensure that every person has access to the resources available to build healthy self-esteem, to have a positive sense of self, and to find meaning in life.

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