



Self-Worth – Causes of Low Self-Worth

Causes of low self-worth

The causes of low self-worth are varied and can come from any number of life challenges, with low self-worth often developed in childhood. Here are more causes:

- Abuse or neglect
- A family history of mental health issues
- Illness or a medical issue
- Death or loss
- Bullying
- Discrimination
- Rigid thinking patterns
- Being on the receiving end of another's attitude, distress or stress
- An absence of positive experiences
- Poor family dynamics
- Teasing from siblings or other relations
- Lack of trusting relationships
- Family break-up
- Moving house or changing communities
- Family stressors, such as homelessness or financial distress.

While medical problems might make a person feel like a collection of ailments rather than a 'real' person, the main cause of low self-worth can often be tracked back to childhood. However, our self-worth ultimately comes back to how we perceive ourselves. While the way in which others treat us might seem to be an important factor in causing low self-worth, it's not necessarily a direct cause. The words, feedback and actions of others might seem the 'truth' in the heat of the moment, but it's only because we accept the feedback as such. What a person experiences informs how they think and feel, and low self-worth becomes a factor when negative experiences become ingrained core beliefs.



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Self-worth and core beliefs

Core beliefs inform how we see ourselves, other people, the world at large, and the events in our lives. These beliefs develop over time, usually from childhood, or through life experiences. They are often absolute or inflexible beliefs that can be difficult to change.

Negative core beliefs can be long-standing negative beliefs that a person has about themselves. They can be created as a response to life challenges. These beliefs may manifest through thoughts such as:

- I'm unlovable
- I'm not good enough
- I'm not good at anything
- I'm not worthy
- I'm useless
- I'm not wanted
- I'm not interesting
- I never get anything right
- It's all my fault
- I'm ugly
- I'm a loser
- I don't matter
- I'm a mistake

A child can easily form a negative core belief, such as 'I'm not wanted', if they're constantly told to go away by their parents. The reinforcing of this core belief can happen at an age when a child is too young to dispute its logic. Negative life experiences, such as troubled relationships or a disappointing work experience can also reinforce negative beliefs a person might have about themselves.

Negative core beliefs can have a profound effect on a person's sense of self and can cause low self-worth.



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Changing core beliefs to challenge low self-worth

To change a core belief means identifying and having an awareness of a belief that is causing you pain. Start simple and just look at one belief. For example, let's look at 'I never get anything right.' Examine this statement and question what evidence exists for this belief, then assess how credible that evidence might be. New perspectives and alternatives to view this statement should appear. For instance, 'I never get anything right' is generally incorrect. This statement can be countered with any number of things that a person can do right, from simple tasks like making coffee to more difficult skills like driving a car. The evidence would suggest that the person is capable of doing many things right. 'I never get anything right' can then be reframed as 'I'm capable of doing anything I put my mind to.'

Changing core beliefs is no easy task, but it can lead to building healthy self-worth. This can mean undoing years of negative thoughts, feelings and thinking patterns, which is likely to be an ongoing task that's best managed with the assistance of psychologist or other therapeutic healthcare provider.

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

The causes of low self-worth are varied. While childhood dysfunction is a common cause of low self-worth, nearly every life situation can cause hurt and create negative core beliefs.

In summary

Low self-worth can cause negative beliefs that are difficult to change. The impact of childhood dysfunction and other trauma can contribute to negative core beliefs that may be difficult to change as a person gets older. Identifying what causes low self-worth and the negative core belief that impacts a person is the first step towards healthy self-worth.



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Changing negative core beliefs is possible, but a person must be willing to examine them in depth to reframe their harmful message into a healthy one. This can lead to better coping skills a pathway to creating healthy self-worth and living a happier life.

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 worth, to have a positive sense of self and to find meaning in life.

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