Build Yourself Up

A guide to building your self-esteem
This guide is one of a series about wellbeing and mental health. This booklet is about self-esteem. Low self-esteem is very common.

Manchester Health and Wellbeing Service produces this series of guides. Research backs up everything in this booklet. The tools and tips work for people. It is about finding out which ones will help you.

Other booklets in this series are:
- From Distress to De-stress
- Improve Your Mood
- Personality Disorders
- Sleep Well
- Unwind your Mind
- Work and Mental Health

The series also includes a set of relaxation audio tracks:
- Distress to De-Stress Relaxation Collection

You can download them free from www.mhim.org.uk

We would like to know what you think about the booklet. We would also like to know how useful it has been. Please e-mail your feedback to resource.feedback@mhsc.nhs.uk. Thank you.
This guide aims to:
- Help you understand self-esteem
- Help you see how your self-esteem can affect your life
- Give you tools to help you raise your self-esteem
- Give you tools to help you look after yourself

This guide has a number of tools for you to try. They aim to help you to improve your self-esteem. Find out what works best for you. They are:

- The vicious cycle of low self-esteem
- Looking at fact and opinion
- Demand evidence
- Build yourself up
- Be your own best friend
- Fake it until you make it
- Treat yourself well

At the end of the guide, there are details about where to get more information, help and treatment.
Getting the most out of the booklet:

A big part of dealing with low self-esteem is finding out what keeps it going. You then need to find out what you can do to raise it. Use this booklet to do this.

The ‘Understanding self-esteem’ section looks at how you develop self-esteem. It explores how low self-esteem can affect your life. It explains how people can end up in a vicious cycle of low self-esteem.

The ‘See it’ section will help you see how low self-esteem affects your life.

The ‘Treat it’ section has a range of tips to help you improve your self-esteem.

The ‘Beat it’ section gives you more ideas on how to make progress. It also lists where you can get further support.

As you read this guide, it will ask you to think about what is going on in your life and how you are feeling. There are spaces in the booklet for you to write things down. You may find that this helps you think more clearly, about how you feel.

What you’ll need:

- A pen and maybe a notebook for extra notes.
- Time for reading and thinking about how you can help yourself.
- Somewhere quiet to read and think.
- To keep going and pace yourself by taking one step at a time.
- Support from a family member, friend or health professional if needed.

If you find it hard to work through the booklet, you might find it useful to talk someone. This could be a health worker such as your doctor or practice nurse. Your focus, energy and motivation levels may be low now; so there may be things it would be better to try first.
Understanding self-esteem

What is self-esteem?

Self-Esteem is the way that we think and feel about ourselves. There are two parts to your self-esteem:

- How much you like yourself.
- How skilled you feel.

Your self-esteem is not fixed; it can change during your life. This can be because of things that happen to you and how you cope with them.

Self-esteem isn’t about feeling better than others. It isn’t about thinking you are perfect. After all, nobody is. It is about being happy with who you are, faults and all.

Everyone has doubts about themselves at times. Sometimes you may feel bad about yourself. You may not feel very secure. This is very common because life can be tough.
This guide will show you a range of ways to improve your self-esteem. Many of them will help you learn to check out your thoughts. It will show you tools to help you change your unhelpful thoughts. Some tools are about helping you feel more confident. Others will look at ways that you can take care of yourself. Before looking at these, it can help to look at self-esteem in more detail. Let’s start by looking at how it can affect people:

**People with good self-esteem** see themselves in a positive but realistic way. They know what their strengths and weaknesses are. They know that they can’t be good at everything. When things do become tough, they feel they can cope or ask for help if they need it.

Having good self-esteem can mean that you are more likely to try new things. This is because you believe in yourself. You are okay if things don’t always work out. You are also more likely to take care of yourself. This is because you respect yourself and think you are worth looking after.

**People with poor self-esteem** tend to focus more on what they are not good at doing. They find it hard to see their strengths. They don’t feel very good about themselves. These negative thoughts can make life feel hard work. When things become tough, they find it hard to cope and ask for help.

Having low self-esteem can make you more at risk of poor mental health. It can also make it tougher to overcome such problems. You are less likely to look after yourself. This can affect your health and wellbeing.
What does good self-esteem look like?

If you have good self-esteem, you will:

- like yourself
- enjoy being you
- only try to be you
- stand up for yourself
- be able to compromise
- admit to your mistakes
- learn from your mistakes
- be kind to yourself and others
- say sorry when you are wrong
- take responsibility for your life
- admit when you have a problem
- ask for help when you need it
- take risks and learning new things
- accept yourself including your faults
- not feel threatened when someone is better than you at something
What does low self-esteem look like?

Low self-esteem can affect many areas of your life. They include your thoughts, emotions, your body and the way you behave. Here is a list of some of the ways low self-esteem can affect people. Please tick any that you know happen to you:

You feel…
- Hurt and upset
- Jealous and resentful
- Angry and irritable about little things
- Things are out of your control
- Embarrassed and ashamed
- Like you are alone
- Like you can’t cope
- Helpless

You mind finds it…
- Has fixed rules: ‘I should’ or ‘I must’
- Reads things in a negative way
- Finds it hard to let go
- Goes over and over things
- Imagines that the worst will happen

Your thoughts might be…
- “I can’t cope”
- “I don’t count”
- “I hate myself”
- “No one loves me”
- “I’m not good enough”
- “Everyone is better than me”
- “Trying is the first step to failure”
- “I am never going to be able to do this”
- “If people really knew me well, they wouldn’t like me”
You might behave by…

- Avoiding things
- Bullying others
- Hurting yourself
- Putting things off
- Eating more or less
- Not looking after yourself
- Being snappy and irritable
- Insisting you are first or last
- Not speaking up for yourself
- Talking too much or too little
- Saying mean things to people
- Gossiping or making fun of others
- Sleeping with people to feel loved
- Doing everything for other people
- Doing/saying things to push others away
- Drinking, taking drugs and/or smoking more

Your body symptoms are…

- Can’t sleep / sleep too much
- Butterflies in the stomach
- Need to go to the toilet
- Headaches
- Feel sick
- Tired
- Tearful
- Tense muscles
- Lower sex drive
- Shallow breathing
- More pain in the body

If you have ticked a number of these circles, you seem to be having symptoms of low self-esteem. However, don’t be alarmed, this is common. Even if you have most of them, you can change the things you don’t like. You will find some useful ideas in this guide.
How self-esteem develops

Your self-esteem starts to grow as soon as you are born. Babies and children pick up cues about the world and their place in it.

The things that happen to you

Babies do not see themselves in a good or bad way. They don’t worry if their bums looked big in a nappy. Such ideas have no meaning at that age.

As a baby, you start to learn what you are worth. When you get your needs met, you feel that you are loveable. You learn that you have value. This is the beginning of your self-esteem.

It develops further if you are encouraged to grow and learn new skills. It helps you to feel good about yourself. If you feel that it is okay to fail, you will not feel so bad when things go wrong. You know that you can learn from it.

When you have a tough time growing up, you can start to feel unlovable. You start to think that you have little or no value. This can stop the growth of good self-esteem. If you feel that it is not okay to fail, you will feel bad when things go wrong. It will strengthen your feelings of worthlessness.
As you get older, you begin to compare yourself to others. You start to work out what you are good at doing. You also become aware of what you are not so good at doing. If you don’t match up to other people, you can start to feel bad about yourself. This happens more if you think that you have to be better than everyone else is.

Other people can also affect how much you like yourself. Your friends and family are very important. Your classmates, teachers and colleagues also play a role. When people are nice to you or praise you, it can be easier to feel good about being you. When you are bullied, you can end up feeling bad about yourself.

Self-esteem continues to develop when you are an adult. The things that happen to you, can affect your self-esteem. So, a child with good self-esteem can end up with low self-esteem as an adult.

Here are some things that affect self-esteem during childhood.

- Not fitting in
- Dealing with an illness
- Going through puberty
- Feeling like the ‘odd’ one out
- How you match up to other people
- How your family are seen by others
- Parents having standards you can’t meet
- Childhood abuse, neglect and punishment
- Childhood trauma such as family breakdown, bereavement and bullying
- Finding it hard to keep up at school
What you think

As a child, you create core beliefs about yourself. These depend on what happens to you as you grow up:

When children feel loved and they are encouraged to try new things, they can end up believing “I have value” or “I can challenge myself”. These are positive core beliefs.

When children feel unloved and people tell them that they are not good enough, they can end up believing “I am worthless” or “I am a bad person”. These are negative core beliefs.

These core beliefs help you make sense of life as a child. They become who you think you are. It is important to remember that these beliefs are only opinion, not fact.

Your core beliefs will develop into rules and beliefs about life. These help you to protect your self-esteem, as long as they are not broken. Here are some examples:
These rules and beliefs are a way of getting through life. They may protect us at first, but in the end, they stop us from being who we really are.

Meet Chris. We will find out more about Chris and his self-esteem through this guide.

Chris, was brought up in a family where
- There were a lot of arguments
- The smallest thing done wrong was punished
- Anything done right was ignored
- Chris was told he was ‘useless’; ‘a waste of space’; and ‘didn’t deserve anything’

Chris soon learnt to keep quiet to protect himself. His core beliefs became ‘I am unlovable and worthless’. His rules and beliefs about life became ‘I must never give my opinion’; and ‘If I speak up, no one will like me’.

These rules and beliefs mean that he is less likely to stand up for himself. This in turn makes him feel worse about himself. His self-esteem takes a knock. This lowers it even more.
What you do

The way you think affects how you behave. It can limit what you are willing to do. The way that you behave can also make your core beliefs stronger.

By keeping to your rules, you may not get your own needs met. This can happen if your rules mean that you do not speak up for yourself. This can make you feel even worse.

While you follow your rules, you can feel okay about yourself. But, it does not give you a chance to see if your thoughts are wrong. Your negative core beliefs will stay the same. You may even believe them more.

Sometimes it is hard to keep to your rules. Things can happen that mean that you have to break them. When you do this, you can feel worse about yourself. You may see it as more proof of how bad you are.

One of Chris’ rules for living is ‘I must never give my opinion’. So, Chris keeps himself to himself and rarely speaks his mind. This usually helps him feel okay. Sometimes he feels like his classmates do not like him. This is because they seem to ignore him. This makes his core belief that he is ‘unlovable and worthless’ stronger.

When Chris changes school, every day starts with form time. Everyone has to say something about his or her day. This means that Chris must break his rule.

He gets very anxious. He is not used to speaking in front of so many people. He thinks that he will mess up and people will tease him. This is because one of his beliefs about life is that ‘if I speak up, no one will like me’. He expects to fail. This strengthens his core belief that he is ‘unlovable and worthless’.
What emotions you feel

The way you think and behave has an impact on your emotions. When you have negative core beliefs, it is hard to feel good about yourself. You are more likely to feel down and unhappy. You may even feel that you don’t deserve to feel good. You are also more likely to worry about things. This can be very stressful.

All of these emotions affect how you think, what you do and how your body feels.

As you have seen, Chris is feeling worthless. He thinks that people are ignoring him. He also thinks that they think he is stupid. All of this leaves him feeling sad and angry.

How your body feels

The way that you think, behave and feel, all have an impact on your body. How you physically feel can also affect your thoughts, what you do and your emotions.

As he gets sad and angry, Chris’ breathing gets faster. He starts to feel hot and sweaty. After a while, he gets a headache and begins to feel sick. Now that he feels unwell, he starts to worry more. This makes him feel worse. His feelings of worthlessness increase.
Model of how low self-esteem develops

This is the model of how low self-esteem develops. It shows that the way Chris was treated had an effect on his thoughts, emotions, body and behaviour.

### Situation: Chris’ childhood
- There were a lot of arguments
- Anything done wrong was punished
- Anything done right was ignored
- He was told he was ‘useless’; ‘a waste of space’; and ‘didn’t deserve anything’

### Thoughts
- **Core Beliefs**: “I am unlovable and worthless”
- **Rules and Beliefs about life**: “I must never give my opinion”
  “If I speak up, no one will like me”
  “For people to like me, I must put them”

### Emotions
- Sad
- Hopeless
- Lonely
- Used
- Angry

### Physical
- Tired
- Headaches
- Aching muscles
- Feels sick
- Upset tummy

### Behaviour
- Goes out of his way to help people
- Rarely speaks his mind
- Sits on his own at lunch
What keeps low self-esteem going?

Low self-esteem keeps going because it can be affected by:
- the things that happen to you
- the way you think
- what you do
- your emotions and
- how your body feels

Low self-esteem can make it harder for you to deal with things that life throws at you. You are less likely to do things that will challenge your negative core beliefs. It can affect your body and health. You can feel like you are weak and can’t cope. This all keeps you stuck in a cycle of low self-esteem.

The things that happen in your life have an impact on you. At times, you will find it hard to follow your own rules. When this happens, your negative core beliefs will be set-off. This makes you feel worse about yourself. So, your low self-esteem becomes active.

This leads to a cycle of low self-esteem. Let’s look at this in more detail.
Things that happen to you

Life is like a rollercoaster. We all have highs and lows. This is just part of daily life. When something happens to you, it takes time to come to terms with it. Sometimes it can make you question what you are worth and how much you like yourself.

Such events include:

- retirement
- being a carer
- a change in life
- losing your job
- being threatened
- being in an abusive relationship
- being out of work for a long time
- stressful events such as bereavement
- loss of your health, such as having a stroke
- having a long term health condition, such as diabetes
- finding out you have an illness which you are ashamed of e.g. HIV, depression, diabetes
- traumatic events, such as being attacked, being flooded and splitting up with your partner

The way that you deal with things like this will depend on your self-esteem.
The way you think

When you have negative core beliefs, it is easy to feel bad about yourself. This is because you:

- are **blind** to your positives. You only see your bad points. If things go well, you think that it was a fluke.
- have **biased thinking**. You interpret what happens to you in a negative way.

Let’s look at these in a bit more detail:

**Blind to your positives**

Picture yourself standing behind a set of blinds at a window. Written on the glass is a list of all the things you think about yourself. It starts with your good points at the top. If you have low self-esteem, it is as if your blinds are only half-open. You can only see what is at the bottom. This confirms all the bad feelings you have about yourself. It is very difficult to see your good points. This makes it hard to challenge your negative thoughts. This is how it is for Chris:

![Blind to your positives diagram](image)

I am...
- clever
- organised
- helpful
- friendly
- hard-working
- funny
- messy
- easily wound-up
- quiet
- spotty
- boring
Biased thinking
The way you think affects your self-esteem. Your thoughts can seem strong and real. However, many thoughts are only opinions, not facts. Some may be true and helpful. Others can be false and unhelpful.

Everybody has unhelpful thoughts. When you have low self-esteem, they happen even more than usual. There are many types of unhelpful thinking. You can find some of them listed on the next page. Can you spot any that you do? Tick any labels of the thoughts you find yourself doing.

Chris really believes that he is worthless and unlovable. This means that he sees something that goes against that belief as an exception to the rule. He thinks that it is just a one-off. So, when things are good, Chris finds it hard to accept. When he gets a compliment, he thinks that it isn’t true. He also thinks that it means he usually looks awful.

As he goes through life, Chris usually sees the bad side of things. It seems to back-up what he already thinks about his self. He remembers the times he had to speak up in class. All he can think about is how awful he felt. His focus is on how badly he did. This negative focus means that he forgets the times it actually went well.

Don’t worry if you can tick many of these labels. Once you can label a thought, you can start to challenge it. There are some ideas about how you can do this in the ‘Treat It’ section of this guide. You can find them from page 24. The booklet ‘Unwind your mind’ has lots of ideas on how to manage unhelpful thoughts. You can download it from www.mhim.org.uk.
Blaming Yourself
You think things are your fault. You do this even if it has little or nothing to do with you.
“IT IS MY FAULT THAT PEOPLE DON’T LIKE ME.”

Expecting the Worst
You expect things to go wrong, no matter what. You expect the worst will happen.
“I’LL LOOK LIKE A FOOL.”

All-or-Nothing Thinking
You do not see a middle ground. Things are put into ‘either/or’ groups.
“If I can’t get the job, it proves that I have nothing to offer.”

Living by Fixed Rules
You think you need to live by rules like ‘should’, ‘ought’ and ‘must’.
“I must never give my opinion.”

Jump to conclusions:
You think things without any proof. You guess what people think (mind reading) and predict the future (fortune).
“If I speak up, no one will like me.”

Negative Focus
You only see the bad things. You see your weaknesses but not strengths.
“I am unlovable and worthless.”
(Chris ignores all of his skills.)
The vicious cycle of low self-esteem

Unhelpful thoughts make you feel worse. This affects your emotions and body. This can mean that you are more at risk of getting stressed, depressed and anxious. This lowers your self-esteem even more.

This is called a **vicious cycle**. The way you think and behave affect how you feel in your body and your emotions. This keeps the cycle going.

Nobody wants to feel bad about his or her self. We try to do things that make us feel better. Some of them make us feel great for a bit. However, they can make us feel worse in the end. They keep the cycle going.

Let’s have a look at Chris again...

Chris has decided that he needs a new job. This is because he feels people at work are using him. By the end of each day, he feels tired and angry. After applying for 42 jobs, he is finally going for an interview.

Chris is sure that he won’t get the job. He almost doesn’t even bother going to the interview! He spends the whole evening before the interview trying to prepare. He doesn’t go to bed until 2am. The next morning he is very tired. He drinks lots of coffee to try to wake him up. This means that he has to go to the loo a few times before he leaves the house. This makes him leave a bit late. He arrives at the interview just on time. Chris does not feel confident. He speaks very quietly. He also answers without thinking first, so it comes out very rushed.

The model over the page shows Chris’ vicious cycle of low self-esteem.
At the end of the interview, Chris is sure that he was rubbish. A week later, he gets a letter to tell him that he didn’t get the job. This is proof to Chris that he is useless and worthless. This makes him feel even worse about himself. The company offer him feedback but he chooses not to phone them. If he had phoned, he would have been told: his knowledge was very good; they were impressed with his answers; they could tell he was nervous; someone with more experience got the job. Having low self-esteem stopped Chris from finding out that he actually did well!

**Situation**

(Event that triggers Chris’ core beliefs)

- He is going for an interview

**Thoughts**

**Blind to positives**

- “I am useless”
- “I should have got an interview before now”
- “I don’t deserve a better job”

**Biased thinking**

- “Things will go wrong”
- “I’ll look like a fool”
- “They won’t like me”
- “I’ll never get the job”

**Emotions**

- Anxious
- Low mood

**Physical**

- Tired
- Headache
- Feels sick
- Upset tummy

**Unhelpful behaviour**

- Stays up late the night before to prepare
- Drinks lots of coffee before the interview
- Talks very quietly and quickly at the interview
Now it is time to think about you. Can you see any vicious cycles in your life? Fill in all the boxes on the model on the next page. You can use the tick boxes on page 5 and 6 to help. Add anything else you can think of.

It can be hard to think of these things by yourself. It can also be quite upsetting. You could ask someone you trust for help and support. You may find talking to a therapist would help. There are details about services in the ‘Beat it’ section of this guide.

You may find it hard to think about what thoughts you have. If this is the case, carry a note pad around with you. You can then jot down any thoughts that pop into your head.

There are things that can break a cycle of low self-esteem. First, it is a good idea to see how things are for you. By looking at your model, you will have a better idea of how your low self-esteem developed. You can also see what keeps it going.
Situation
Things in your life, past and present

Thoughts

Emotions

Body

Behaviour
What next?

You should now have a better idea of what affects your self-esteem. The good news is there are many things you can do to change this cycle. If you make a small change in one area, it will affect all the other areas.

The next part of this guide looks at what you can do to improve your self-esteem. It covers a range of hints and tips. Some things you can do straight away. Other things are going to take more time and practice.

Take your time and read all of the ‘Treat it’ section. Choose one thing to try first. You can then try other tips later. It is best to do one at a time. That way you will be able to see if it works. It will also stop you from feeling overwhelmed. It can be hard to make lots of changes at once.
Treat it

Looking at fact and opinion

When you feel low, it is easy to think that your thoughts are facts. It is also easy to accept other people’s views as facts. Often what we think is a fact is really just an opinion. This means that it might not be true. When you know a thought is not true, you can reject it.

What can you say about this moth?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The moth...</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FACT</td>
<td>OPINION</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is orange</td>
<td></td>
<td>is beautiful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>has spots</td>
<td></td>
<td>is scary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>has two pairs of wings</td>
<td></td>
<td>is cute</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on evidence

Does not change

Personal point of view

Varies

The facts are that this is an orange moth with spots. These facts do not change.

Some people love moths. They think they are beautiful. Other people are afraid of them. They think they are scary. These are opinions. They can vary from one person to another. Opinions are not the same as facts. Not everyone is going to have the same view as you. You do not have to accept an opinion. Instead, you can reject it.
When stressed, it is easy to think that thoughts (like your opinions) are facts. Low self-esteem can make you feel like this too. You are more likely to accept opinions as facts. Your emotions affect how strongly you believe opinions. So, your emotions seem to back up your opinions. Your opinions also strengthen your emotions. They make them feel like fact. This can end up being a vicious cycle.

Let’s look at Chris again...

Chris is walking home down the high street when his friend Russell walks past him without saying ‘Hello’.

Straight away Chris thinks ‘He’s ignored me on purpose’; ‘He doesn’t like me’; ‘He’s being really rude’. Chris starts to feel upset and angry. By the time he gets home, he is in an awful mood.

Chris’ thoughts are all opinion.

The only fact is that Russell walked past him.

By seeing his thoughts as opinion, Chris is less likely to get upset. There could be many reasons why Russell did not say ‘Hello’. Next, Chris needs to learn how to challenge his thoughts.
Demand evidence

Challenge unhelpful thinking
The way you interpret things depends on many things. These can include the things you know, life events, your culture and what you believe.

Here are some questions to go through. See how Chris challenges his unhelpful thought:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the unhelpful thought?</th>
<th>“Russell has ignored me on purpose.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What evidence do I have for this?</td>
<td>He walked past me and did not say ‘Hello’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is my thought opinion or fact?</td>
<td>Opinion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What type of unhelpful thinking am I doing?</td>
<td>I am jumping to conclusions: mind reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there another way of seeing this?</td>
<td>He might not have seen me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What would I say to a friend who thought this?</td>
<td>“Russell is a good friend, he might have been lost in thought. He probably did not see you.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the chances that my first thought was true?</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is a more realistic thought?</td>
<td>“Russell must not have seen me. I wonder if he is okay.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You can dismiss your unhelpful thought. You know it is not true. You can replace it with a better one.
Challenge expectations and beliefs

Look for proof

Often the best way to see if a belief is true is to check it out. You can do that by thinking about what might happen if it were true. You can then test it out and see what happens.

Chris has looked at his first thought about Russell. However, he still feels unsure of himself. He uses the next set of questions to help him check out his belief a bit more. He will also check out what he expects to happen.

You can use these questions when you:

- feel stuck with a thought, or
- are worried about what might happen.

By doing the questions, you can calm yourself. They can help you to develop a more balanced way of thinking. You can download a blank copy from www.mhim.org.uk.
**What is my belief?**

“People who ignore me are being rude on purpose. It is because they do not like me.”

**What do I expect to happen if it were true?**

They would ignore me every time I saw them.
Russell will be rude to me when we meet up next.

**How can I test this out?**

I’m going out bowling next week so I could see how Russell is then.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the worst that could happen?</th>
<th>What could I do to cope if the worst did happen?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Russell could tell me that he doesn’t like me. I’ll make a fool of myself.</td>
<td>If Russell doesn’t like me then I need to think about my friends that do. If he starts to be nasty, I can get up and walk away.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the best that could happen?</th>
<th>What is most likely to happen?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Russell tells me that he thinks I’m great and he values my friendship.</td>
<td>We’re going to get along okay and have a good night out. Russell will probably tell me that I’m being daft.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**How does it affect me when I expect the worst?**

It makes me feel bad about myself. I feel like I’m alone and that no one cares. I feel sick and get a knotted stomach.

**Are there any positives that I might be missing?**

I have some very good friends. I know they like me because they are there when I need them.

**How else could I see the situation?**

Even if Russell doesn’t like me, it isn’t the end of the world. I have other friends who do. Russell probably didn’t see me the other day.

**What really happened?**

Russell was fine with me. I asked him if things were okay. He is worried about his brother. He just didn’t notice me the other day.
Build yourself up

Open your blinds
Self-esteem is about having a balanced view of your self. That includes the good stuff as well as the not so good stuff. You may have a long list of things that you don’t like about yourself. But, how long is your list of good stuff? Quickly jot down any good stuff about yourself in the notes section at the back of the booklet.

How easy did you find that to do? It is common for people to find it hard to think of what is good about their selves. When you have low self-esteem, it is easy to forget your good qualities. It can also feel weird thinking about them. Some people might see it as being arrogant or ‘big-headed’. This is understandable. You have been used to seeing all your negatives for a long time. What you are doing now, is trying to have a more balanced view of yourself.

When Chris opens his blinds, he can now see his good points. He can also still see those things that he does not like about himself.
It can be tough even to think about what are examples of positive traits. So, here is a list of some. Do you recognise any of them in you?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>positive</th>
<th>positive</th>
<th>positive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>considerate</td>
<td>reliable</td>
<td>helpful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>good listener</td>
<td>funny</td>
<td>adventurous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>patient</td>
<td>friendly</td>
<td>creative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>polite</td>
<td>organised</td>
<td>active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>responsible</td>
<td>loves animals</td>
<td>individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>determined</td>
<td>house proud</td>
<td>loyal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>good with cars</td>
<td>good cook</td>
<td>good friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>likes having a giggle</td>
<td>loving</td>
<td>good listener</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reads a lot</td>
<td>hard working</td>
<td>giving</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

See your positive side
Set aside some time each day to do this activity. You will need to think about all your good points. List your strengths, talents and successes. Ask someone you trust to give you ideas if you get stuck.

You could use your notepad to jot things in. When someone gives you a compliment, write it down. This will stop you from forgetting it. You can then add it to your list.

If you are stuck, have a go at these questions:

- What have I achieved?
- What do I like about me?
- What are my positive features?
- What skills and talents do I have?
- What tough times have I coped with?
- What do others say they like about me?
- What traits do I like in other people that I can see in myself?
- If I met someone like me, what would I like about him or her?
Keep a journal
You now have a list of your positive traits. Next, it is helpful to see when you use them. This will make them more real. This will give you more confidence to believe in your good self points. Set aside some quiet time to focus on this task. It is important to give yourself time to focus and think.

Looking at the past
Choose one of your positive traits. Write down some examples of when you have shown them in the past. Do this for each of your traits. It might take some time, but it is time well spent. You are worth it.

This is the start of Chris’ list:
**Trait:** Organised

**Examples:**
I make sure that I have stuff in for breakfast so I don’t have to rush in the morning.
I planned for my interview and got there on time.

Looking at now
Each day try to write three things you did that day that show your positive traits. Do this every day. It will remind you that you use your positive traits all the time.

This is Chris’ example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>What I did</th>
<th>Positive Trait</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>29/02/2012</td>
<td>Helped a colleague with some work</td>
<td>Helpful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Finished a project</td>
<td>Hard working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did the washing-up</td>
<td>Organised</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Be your own best friend

To have compassion is part of human nature. We care for our friends. We support them when they are down. We offer them care and compassion. However, many of us find it hard to do the same for ourselves.

Being kind to oneself is not always that easy. You may feel that giving yourself a hard time is the only way to get yourself going. It is easy to think about an event that has happened and to feel bad about it. It can seem to happen without even trying. However, there is more than one way to think about your upset. One way leads to more misery. The other way leads to less.

It takes time to get used to being kinder to yourself. Every time you practise, the brain rewires itself. This makes it easier to be self-compassionate. It has a proven positive effect on wellbeing. It can help people feel happier and more hopeful. It can combat anxiety and depression. It can also make it easier for you to relate to others. This can then allow you to be more able to forgive and feel accepted.

This is how it could be for Chris

1. **Being your own worst enemy:** “Russell is so rude. He must hate me. I am so stupid for thinking that he liked me.” This makes Chris feel under threat. His body goes into a reactive mode.

2. **Being your own best friend:** “It is upsetting when I feel ignored. I’m sure everyone feels like this at times. I wonder if Russell saw me. We usually get on well.” This makes Chris feel supported and cared for. His body goes into a responsive mode.
Compassion is a great way for you to help support yourself through tough times. There are three parts to being self-compassionate:

1. **Accept that this is a moment of suffering.**
   We feel distress because life can be hard. You may feel awful now, but that will pass. Use relaxation to calm yourself. (The ‘From Distress to De-stress’ guide has ideas about how you can do this.) Use self-talk to be aware of your suffering in that moment.
   “This is upsetting. I feel like nobody really likes me.”

2. **Accept that humans are imperfect and we all suffer.**
   Bad things happen to all of us. We all go through hard times. None of us is perfect either. It is human to mess-up at times.
   “Other people worry about what others think of them. I’m not the only one.”

3. **Express kindness and compassion towards yourself.**
   Give yourself the green light to be kind to you. Talk to yourself in a soothing way. Use any phrase that can help you feel supported and safe. “I am doing the best I can. Feeling like this does not make me a bad person.” It can be a struggle to do this at first: Try to think what you would say to a close friend going through the same thing. You could also think about what friend might say to you.

   Humans respond to warmth and gentle touch. It can help to do an action that helps you feel soothed. You could place your hands over your heart or cradle your head.

   Treat yourself with kindness. Ask yourself what useful steps you could do that would be soothing. It might be having a cup of tea, or a relaxing bath. You can find more ideas on the www.mhim.org.uk website.
Fake it until you make it

It can be hard to change the way you think. Sometimes it is easier to change what you do. This in turn can improve the way you think about yourself. So, what you need to do is to start to behave as if you have good self-esteem: Fake it until you make it!

Act the part
Your body language tells a lot about you. People read it often without thinking. It reflects your mood. It also reflects how confident you feel. With a little practice, you can use these tips to appear confident and capable. No one will be able to tell what is going on in your head. They will just see a person with good body language.

This is what good body language looks like. You could practise this in front of a mirror.

- Good eye contact – long enough to see what colour eyes a person has
- Avoid hands in pockets or crossed arms
- Stand up straight with shoulders back
- Head up and face forward
- Talk with your hands
- Widen your stance
- Lower your voice
- Firm handshake
- Look good
- Smile
**Plan of action**

The first step to change is to see how things are for you now. Use a diary to record what you get up to over a week. After you have done an activity, score it for pleasure and achievement. Give it a mark between 0 and 10 (0=none to 10=lots).

As you keep your diary, you will be able to see what you have achieved each day. You will also be able to see how much fun and enjoyable stuff you do.

Look at your diary and see what you would like to change.
- Do you need more pleasure?
- How could you treat yourself?
- What fun things could you add?
- How can you be kinder to yourself?
- Are there things that you need to do but are avoiding?
- Are you pushing yourself the right amount? (not too much, but enough)

The next step is to plan what you are going to do over the next week. Use your diary to help you plan a range of things. Try to include things that are
- pleasurable,
- social,
- physical,
- that give you a sense of achievement and
- that have to be done.

Give each activity a score, just as you did before. Aim for a balance over the week. You can download a free copy of an activity schedule from www.mhim.org.uk.
Be good to yourself
It can be hard to be good to yourself when you do not feel great. It can affect what you think you deserve. You may stop doing things that make you feel good. This can make you feel worse.

Part of building healthy self-esteem is to be good to yourself. It is about doing things that are good for you. This can be a struggle at first. It may feel a bit strange to think about such things. So, start by making a list of things that you would like to do. Include activities that you enjoy, that are relaxing or that are a treat. Think about things that you have always wanted to do but haven’t yet. Don’t limit yourself: Write anything down even if it seems crazy. Think of big and small things you could do. There is a list on the next page to give you some ideas.

This is Chris’ list:

- Eat a chocolate éclair
- Open a bottle of wine and watch a movie
- Go to a car show
- Go window-shopping for a Porsche
- Have a soak in the bath
- **Find out about bungee jumping**
- Play football with my mates once a week
- Go to bed before midnight on a weekday
- Take time to learn about relaxation

Now you have a list of things you would like to do. When you think of something new, add it to the list. Make plans to do the things on your list. Aim to do at least one thing for yourself every day. You can download a problem-solving tool from www.mhim.org.uk. Use it to help you plan what you will do to reach your goals.
Things that feel good

1. Have a relaxing bath
2. Go for a walk
3. Go to a movie
4. Plan your career
5. Laugh
6. Cook a nice meal
7. Have a family meal
8. Go for a picnic
9. Have a quiet night in
10. Have a duvet day
11. Bake a cake
12. Have a spa day
13. Doodle
14. Plan a party
15. Go to a sports match
16. Talk to family
17. Say ‘I love you’
18. Dress up
19. Sex
20. Have a lie in
21. Relax
22. Join a club
23. Learn a new skill
24. Go to the theatre
25. Go for a coffee
26. Watch a comedy series
27. Fly kites
28. Walk the dog
29. Flower arranging
30. Pet your pets
31. Play football
32. Chat to friends
33. Make a ‘to do’ list
34. Go swimming
35. Go bird watching
36. Play the piano
37. Listen to music
38. Buy new clothes
39. Read a novel
40. Go sightseeing
41. Clean the house
42. Join a choir
43. Compliment someone
44. Take care of plants
45. Do some DIY
46. Play golf
47. Go to the beach
48. Pray
49. Meditate
50. Go for a drive
51. Listen to an audio book
52. Use social media
53. Masturbate
54. Make a gift
55. Give a gift
56. Learn self-defence
57. Meet new people
58. Listen to others
59. Watch a film
60. Do a crossword
61. Star gaze
62. Spend time alone
63. Play board games
64. Surf the internet
65. Go dancing
66. Shoot pool
67. Knit
68. Kiss a loved one
69. Go to the library
70. Listen to the radio
71. Hug someone
72. Have a sauna
73. Photography
74. Keep a journal
Treat yourself well

You can treat yourself well in many ways. The skill of ‘looking after you’ and being aware of your needs is important. Some people feel guilty when they take care of their own needs. But, taking care of you is a good thing. You will be better able to deal with the ups and downs that life will throw at you. You will also be more able to support others when you feel strong and well rested.

**Treat yourself:** Take time out. Enjoy being yourself and do something just for you. It might be having a bubble bath or going to watch a film.

**Connect:** Build bonds with people. It can help you feel supported. It can also allow you to feel closer to others. People have always lived in groups. Having a good set of friends and family can improve your wellbeing.

**Eat well:** Your brain uses up more than 50% of the energy in the food you eat. That is why it is important to eat starchy food like rice, pasta, bread and potatoes. When you do not eat well, your brain cannot work properly. Eating your 5-a-day helps improve physical and mental health. It includes fresh, frozen, canned or dried fruit and vegetables. It is also important to eat protein such as meat, fish, beans, tofu and quorn. Omega3 oils found in oily fish and dark green vegetables are vital for a healthy brain. So is drinking enough liquid each day. The booklet ‘Food and Mood’ has more information. You can download it free from mhim.org.uk.

**Vitamin D:** There is very little Vitamin D in the food we eat. Our skin makes Vitamin D from sunlight. However, this only happens between the months of March and October. You only need to spend 20 minutes in the sun each day, if you have pale skin. The darker you are, the longer you will need to spend in the sun. Many breakfast cereals and all margarines (but not low fat spreads) have Vitamin D added to them. Just check out the label. You can also buy Vitamin D tablets to take once a day.
**Sleep well:** This lets the body and mind recuperate and rest. When you don’t sleep well, your brain does not work properly. You can use relaxation and breathing techniques in bed to help you to fall asleep. Read the guide ‘**Sleep Well**’ for more information. You can download free from mhim.org.uk.

**Talk to someone you really trust:** Just talking about what is stressing you out can make you feel better. Or, use a telephone helpline (from page 43).

**Be active:** This can make you feel fitter and more confident. It is also good for reducing stress. Choose something that you enjoy and can fit into your lifestyle. Aim toward 30 minutes of activity at least five times a week. Walking, gardening and doing the housework are all examples of physical activity. Visit gettingmanchestermoving.org for information about what is going on in Manchester. The booklet ‘**Physical Activity and Mood**’ has even more tips about getting started. You can download it free from mhim.org.uk.

**Take one thing at a time:** Things can sometimes feel overwhelming. Decide what is most important. Then tackle the most essential job first.

**Give:** This is about doing something nice for others. Helping someone else can make you feel good about yourself. It will make other people feel good too. It could be as simple as smiling at a stranger or holding a door open for someone. You could help a neighbour or friend. You could even do random acts of kindness. It can feel great to volunteer at a local community group or charity. You could meet new people, learn new skills and gain valuable experience.

**Distract yourself:** Having something else to focus on helps to lessen stress. So, you could try out a new hobby!
Keep learning: Your brain needs exercise too. So, learn or rediscover skills. It builds confidence and esteem. You will feel more able to cope with life. There are a number of life skills courses available across Manchester. For more information, contact Self Help Services on 0161 226 3871. There are also free computerised Cognitive Behavioural Therapy courses online. Details about such websites are at the end of this guide.

Take notice: Notice the world around you. It can put things in perspective and brighten your day. Often we can go around in autopilot and miss the little things that could improve our mood. Keep an eye out for rainbows, architecture and nature!

Relax: This helps the body and mind recover and rest. You can relax in many ways. Some people read; others paint and draw; some people knit and others spend time with animals. Try to find a way that works for you. Breathing skills can reduce the affect of stress on the body. Read the booklet ‘From Distress to De-stress’ for more information. You can download it free from mhim.org.uk.

Be creative: Express yourself in some way. You could try painting, writing or dancing. The ‘Get Creative’ booklet has many good ideas. You can download it free from www.mhim.org.uk.

Take time out to play: Having fun is a great way to reduce stress. Enjoying time with your friends helps you feel good. You could play on a games console or have a go on the swings at the park.

Avoid self-medication: They may make you feel a bit better or numb the pain for a while. However, using drugs or alcohol can often become an extra problem.

Ask for help if you need it: There is a list of services at the end of this guide.
Beat it

Practice, practice, practice…

Things are not going to change overnight. It can be a challenge to make changes to the way you have been doing things for so long. But, with practice it will become easier and easier. In the end, the changes will feel like second nature as you get used to them.

There is a lot of information in this booklet. It might be useful to read it more than once. Try each technique a few times and keep practising the ones that you find useful.

Do not expect too much too soon. It may take some time for you to change the way you think and feel. It is a bit like learning to walk as a toddler. We all fall over at first. You might even bang your head or graze your knee. Luckily, despite these setbacks, you kept going and eventually learnt to walk. It didn’t happen overnight. It took time and practice. It is the same for overcoming low self-esteem. It is not going to happen straight away. But, it will be worth it in the end.

After a while, it is useful to go back and check your checklists. You will be able to see if there have been any changes.
Coping with setbacks

Everyone has setbacks. Life is like that! The trick is to find ways to cope with them. When they do occur, remember that it happens to everyone. It does not mean that you have failed, so it is important not to give yourself a hard time. If you do start to think things like ‘I’m a failure’, you can use the Demand Evidence section of this booklet to challenge your thoughts.

When you have a setback, try to remember that you are not back to square one. It can be easy to forget about all the progress you have already made. Try to use it as a learning experience. We often learn more from things when they don’t go quite right compared to when they go smoothly. Take some time to reflect on what has happened. Try to understand why it has happened and what you can learn from it. You may be able to find a pattern to what is going on.

Finally – don’t give up! Overcoming low self-esteem takes time and practice. It may take a while to notice some improvements. It is worth taking some time each month to look at the progress you have made.
Other sources of help

Books

Overcoming Low Self-Esteem, by M Fennell
Ten Days to Self-Esteem, by D Burns
Managing Low Self-esteem, by W Dryden
The Self-Esteem Workbook, by L Field
Self-Help Stuff That Works, by A Khan
59 Seconds: Think a little, change a lot, by R Wiseman

Organisations

Anxiety UK
Anxiety UK provides information and support about a range of issues to do with anxiety.
Website: anxietyuk.org.uk
Helpline: 08444 775 774 (Mon-Fri 9.30am-5.30pm)

Depression Alliance
They provide information and support for people living with depression.
Website: www.depressionalliance.org

Depression UK
This is a national self-help organisation that helps people cope with their depression.
Website: www.depressionuk.org
Info line: 0870 7744320

National Debt Line
They offer help for anyone in debt or worried about falling into debt.
Website: www.nationaldebtline.co.uk
Helpline: 0808 808 4000 (Mon-Fri 9am-9pm, Sat 9.30am-1pm)
**No Panic**  
They offer free, advice and information about anxiety, panic and phobias. The helpline acts as a nighttime anxiety line that is an answer phone service only.  
Website:  www.nopanic.org.uk  
Helpline:  0800 138 8889  (10am-10pm every day)

**Relate**  
They offer advice, counselling, workshops, mediation and support around relationship issues.  
Website:  anxietyuk.org.uk  
Helpline:  0300 100 1234  (Mon-Thurs 8am-10pm, Fri 8am-6pm, Sat 9am-5pm)

**Step Change Debt Charity**  
They offer support to manage debt problems.  
Website:  www.stepchange.org  
Helpline:  0800 138 1111  (Mon-Fri 8am-8pm, Sat 8am-4pm)

**The Samaritans**  
The helpline provides confidential emotional support for people who are experiencing feelings of distress, despair or suicidal thoughts.  
Helpline:  08457 909090  (24 hours a day, every day)

**The Silver Line**  
They provide a free confidential helpline providing advice and befriending to older people.  
Website:  www.thesilverline.org.uk  
Helpline:  0800 4 70 80 90  (24 hours a day, every day)

**Young Minds**  
They work to improve the emotional wellbeing and mental health of children and young people.  
Website:  www.youngminds.org.uk  
Parent helpline:  0808 802 5544 (Mon-Fri 9.30am-4pm)
Websites

**www.mhim.org.uk**
This is the ‘Mental Health in Manchester’ website. It has information about mental health issues. There are details of local services. It also includes information in a range of languages.

**www.cci.health.wa.gov.au**
This website features free online self-help modules and resources.

**ecouch.anu.edu.au**
E-couch is a free self-help interactive program. It covers a range of topics. These include modules for depression, anxiety and worry.

**www.gettingmanchestermoving.org**
There are details about where you can be active in Manchester. There are also links to health advice.

**www.getselfhelp.co.uk**
This website offers free Cognitive Behavioural Therapy self-help information, resources and includes therapy worksheets.

**www.llttf.com**
The ‘Living Life to the Full’ website. This is a free, online life skills course. It covers a range of skills the help deal with everyday stresses.

**moodgym.anu.edu.au**
Moodgym is a free self-help program. It covers a range of skills to help prevent and deal with depression.

**www.rcpsych.ac.uk**
This is the Royal College of Psychiatrists’ website. It is an online mental health resource

**yogaforpainrelief.com**
Learn some simple techniques for managing pain.
Local Services

42nd Street
42nd Street works with young people (aged 13–25) living in Manchester, Salford and Trafford. They provide a range of support services to young people under stress.
Website: 42ndstreet.org.uk
Tel: 0161 228 1888

Age Concern Counselling Service
This is a counselling service for Manchester residents aged 60 and over and their carers.
Website: silverservice.org.uk/info-advice/counselling.html
Tel: 0800 027 57 87

Active Lifestyles
You need to be a member to attend sessions. This is free to do. You can join at your first session. There is a huge range of activities to try for only £1 per session.
Website: www.manchester.gov.uk/activelifestyles
E-mail: activelifestyles@manchester.gov.uk
Tel: 0161 232 3100

Community Health Trainers
They offer support to make healthy changes. This includes help to sleep more soundly.
Website: www.mphds.org/mphds/health-trainers/health-trainers
E-mail: healthtrainers@nhs.net
Tel: 0161 861 2548

Manchester Citizens Advice Bureau
They offer free, confidential, impartial and independent advice and information on a wide range of subjects.
Website: www.manchestercab.org.uk
Tel: 08444 111 222
Manchester Carers Forum
They offer a range of support for carers.
Website: www.manchestercarersforum.org.uk
Tel: 0161 819 2226

Manchester Mind
Manchester Mind offers a range of services including:
- Advice, information & counselling services
- Young Adult Advice & Support Project (YASP)
Website: harp-project.org
Tel: 0161 226 9907

Self Help Services
Self Help Services is a user-led mental health charity in Manchester. It provides a range of services in the North West.
Website: www.selfhelpservices.org.uk
Tel: 0161 226 3871

South Manchester Healthy Living Network (SMHLN)
SMHLN covers areas of south Manchester. It offers a range of wellbeing services.
Website: www.mhsc.nhs.uk/services/wellbeing-services/south-manchester-healthy-living-network
Tel: 0161 217 3667

The Sanctuary
This is an overnight service for adults. They must live in Manchester. It is for people who feel that they are at crisis point. They offer support with issues such as anxiety, panic attacks, depression or suicidal thoughts.
Tel: 0161 637 0808 (11pm-9am every night)

YASP
They offer services for young people aged 13 to 25, who find themselves under stress. These include internet cafe, counselling, mentoring, befriending, advice drop-in and volunteering.
Website: www.harp-project.org/projects/project_yasp_index.php
Tel: 0161 221 3054
ZEST
Zest covers areas of north and east Manchester. It offers a range of wellbeing services.
Website: zestactivities.blogspot.co.uk
E-mail: zest@manchester.gov.uk
Tel: 0161 234 3715

NHS mental health services

Manchester Mental Health and Social Care Trust
Website: www.mhsc.nhs.uk
Tel (9am-7pm): 0161 882 2400 (citywide)
Tel (7pm-9pm): 0161 720 2045 (North)
0161 276 53 68 (Central)
0161 277 1224 (South)
Tel (9pm-9am): 0161 922 3801 (citywide)

African & Caribbean Mental Health Service
Offer a range of services to African and Caribbean people with mental health problems aged 16 and over.
Tel: 0161 226 9562

Emerge 16/17
They offer a mental health service only for 16 and 17 year olds.
Website: www.cmft.nhs.uk
Tel: 0161 226 7457