

Self-Confidence

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Self-Confidence is quite simply when you have confidence in yourself. It is often seen as the holy grail of psychotherapy in the belief that the right amount of confidence in oneself will solve problems from anxiety to depression. And while it is true that higher confidence in one's ability to get somewhere increases the sense of control and self-directedness, knowing where one is going is important as well. If where you are going is an extension of your values, you will also have more self-esteem, because you feel that you are adding to your own value.

Self-Belief

Central to the feeling of self-confidence is the capability for self-belief, what an individual believes about the own abilities and attributes. This can be determined in part by heredity, but is to a large extent by one's social environment. Our environments in school, college and at the workplace have a large influence on the beliefs we hold about ourselves. But also, depression and other mental health conditions can lower one's sense of self-efficacy and the ability to pursue one's values and interests. In rarer cases, they can also lead to an inadequately high sense of self-belief and self-confidence, as in the case of mania where one might feel able to change the world in a day or be invincible, for example.

The Perceived Lack of Self-Confidence

Many people believe they lack self-confidence. They often see it as a reason for their problems and their inability to lead happy and fulfilled lives. This means they perceive a deficit, the feeling that something important is lacking, even if they cannot identify what it is. The deficit is often seen as a significant hindrance in one's life, a reason why one cannot attain his or her goals in life. Interestingly, when one asks people who think they suffer from low self-confidence what their values, interests, goals and aspirations are, there is only a vague reply, if at all.

Disconnection from Oneself and the World

My work with clients over many years has lead me to believe that this deficit is really a disconnection with one's inner self and the world around. It is usually not that the necessary foundations for self-confidence are lacking, but that individuals suffering from low self-confidence are disconnected from them.

Values, Interests and Aspirations

Through our interactions with the world around us and the thoughts in us we develop a map of what is important to us and its essence, the values we hold. Our values and basic interests can provide a stable and solid direction for the paths we choose and the decisions we take in life.

If we do what is important to us and which is in sync with our values, we are important to ourselves. A problem is that many people are afraid to look at their interests in values out of fear that this might change their life in an uncontrollable and radical way. They acknowledge that they might be far off their optimal path, but do not want to change direction. However, change should be gradual and knowing more about one's values and interests makes the world and the sense of oneself a more, rather than less, stable place.

Imagination

An important question is to ask what would you do if you had the self-confidence you are looking for. Many people have never thought about this before, but imagining the future is actually a very effective antidote to the world without it.

'Doing' Self-Confidence

Self-Confidence is a feeling you get when you do the things that inspire self-confidence. The things we imagine that we done once we have self-confidence are actually the things that could help instill self-confidence. So instead, do the things you plan on doing after you feel self-confident, and you will build self-confidence. The more self-confidence is no longer an issue, the more self-confident you are.

How to get there? In the short run 'positive thinking' may help, but in the long-term one really has to examine one's values, needs, wants and aspirations. In the long-run, only if you do the things that are in line with your values and meet your needs and wants and help you attain your aspirations, will you do something that can instill self-confidence. You will become more proficient and skilled in it, and this also builds self-confidence. Self-confidence arises out of life-experience.

How one makes decisions and how one communicates with the environment has to fit one's style and the things one wants to achieve. It also reflects on oneself as a person and the sense of self humans have. If you have a stable sense of who you are, how you make decisions and of yourself in general, your emotions and behavior will be more stable as well. This again builds self-confidence and a stable sense of who you are.

Changing Focus

What helps in times of change is to focus on the things that remain constant, our values and interests, our sense of self and who we are. Having a stable sense of self helps in the face of sudden change, whether positive or negative change. Winning the lottery has ripped many from their comfortable paths and actually left them worse off psychologically and financially in the long- and even medium-term.

Happiness

So, what are these stable components and how can one learn about them? You know what you are interested in because doing it feels good over the long run. Your values are what you get emotional about when they are valued. If there are not many emotions attached to something it may be something your environment wants you to do, but which is not that important to you. You learn about these things by communicating with yourself. Many people have gotten out of touch with themselves because they think they have to have different values and interests. But the truth is that they do not change much over time, if at all, because they are too closely linked with who we are and our sense of self. When we follow them we feel ourselves the most.

Self-confidence is therefore about doing things one enjoys. Feeling good is a prerequisite for building self-confidence because it attaches good feelings to what you do and think, and thereby also to yourself. This builds lasting and stable self-confidence.

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