

8 Suggestions for Strengthening Self-Esteem When You Have Depression

By MARGARITA TARTAKOVSKY, M.S.
Associate Editor
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Depression and low self-esteem often go hand-in-hand. Low self-esteem leaves individuals vulnerable to depression. Depression batters self-esteem. *

"Depression often distorts thinking, making a once-confident person feel insecure, negative and self-loathing," said [Deborah Serani](#), Psy.D, a clinical psychologist and author of the book [Living with Depression](#).

Past positive or neutral thoughts become "I am incompetent," "I suck at everything," or "I hate myself," according to clinical psychologist [Dean Parker](#), Ph.D.

(On the other hand, "High self-esteem is associated with certain positive cognitions or beliefs, such as 'I am good,' 'I am a success,' [or] 'I am valuable to others,'" he said.)

While low self-esteem may be deeply rooted, you can start chipping away at the layers of loathing. Each day, you can engage in an activity that improves your self-esteem. Below, Serani and Parker share their tips on strengthening self-esteem, whether it's in the moment or over time.

1. Deal with dysfunctional thinking. "Research shows that negative thinking is the linchpin responsible for setting off low self-esteem," Serani said. Depression also colors your world. "Depression corrodes judgment and thinking styles," she said. Negative thoughts become destructive, making you susceptible to poor decisions and abusive situations, she said.

Parker likened this cycle to a bad mp3 that "repeatedly states one's failures and self-doubts until they feel defeated and see no hope or future."

Addressing these corrosive cognitions is critical. A valuable strategy is to investigate your thoughts for accuracy. Serani suggested asking these three questions:

- "What evidence supports my thinking?"
- Would others say this is true about me?
- Does feeling this way make me feel good about myself or bad about myself?"

This also includes replacing negative thoughts with positive ones. But, as Parker underscored, this doesn't mean repeating empty affirmations. Rather, it's about creating and using factual and meaningful self-statements.

The reality is that everyone has strengths and weaknesses. Having a solid self-esteem means accepting and appreciating all your sides. As Psych Central's founder, John Grohol, Psy.D, noted in this [piece on self-esteem](#):

People with a good and healthy self-esteem are able to feel good about themselves for who they are, appreciate their own worth, and take pride in their abilities and accomplishments. They also acknowledge that while they're not perfect and have faults, those faults don't play an overwhelming or irrationally large role in their lives or their own self-image (how you see yourself).

2. Journal. Keeping negative thoughts in your head only makes them bigger, Parker said. Journaling about these thoughts brings them down to size, he said. It also helps you see the good things that *do* exist in your world.

Thus, in addition to listing the negative thoughts, Parker suggested recording the positive aspects of your life, such as your health or loved ones. (For instance, for every negative thought you record, jot down something positive beside it.)

3. Seek positive support. "Surround yourself with people who celebrate your strengths, not your weaknesses," Serani said. Doing so not only feels good, but it also "helps solidify positive thinking," she said.

4. Create visual cues. Visual cues provide perspective and help you curb negative self-talk, Serani said. For instance, she suggested leaving positive notes around your house and office and keeping inspiring quotes on your desktop.

5. Begin the day with a boost. Find books, calendars and websites that are uplifting and inspiring to you, Parker said. For instance, he mentioned this [power of positivity page on Facebook](#). Or start your day with a dose of laughter, he said. ([Humor heals.](#)) Facebook also has funny memes you can follow, he said. While they might seem simple, these daily gestures are another way to create a supportive environment.

6. Soothe yourself. Both Serani and Parker stressed the importance of nurturing yourself, even when this is the last thing you think you deserve or want to do. (In fact, that's when it's *especially* vital.)

"Feed your mind, body and soul in ways that make you feel special," Serani said. These ways don't need to be grand (and overwhelming). For instance, you might carve out time in your day for quiet and stillness, she said. (Even several minutes work, she added.) You might enjoy simple comforts such as a "hot cup of coffee, a beautiful song or a colorful sunset," she said. Or you might "celebrate what you already have and not what you desire."

7. Discover and pursue your passions. When you're depressed and your self-esteem feels like it's sinking daily, it's easy to overlook your passions. Parker suggested readers take the time to "write a list of things you used to love to do and stopped doing along with things you always wanted to do but haven't done yet."

He gave the example of a client who believed she wouldn't amount to anything and regularly compared herself to her successful friends. When Parker first asked about her passions, she couldn't identify any. Parker suggested she take a closer look and contemplate her positive qualities and interests. After writing these down, she realized she wanted to become a personal trainer. Now she's taking courses and working toward her

certification. Identifying and pursuing her passion has boosted her confidence and given her a greater purpose.

8. Redefine failure, and keep trying. When you have low self-esteem, it's common to think of yourself as a complete and utter failure. But failure is part of success, Parker said. Failure doesn't characterize you as a person or determine your self-worth.

When Parker coached Little League, he'd tell his players that he didn't care if they made errors on the field. What he did care about was that they were swinging and missing rather than just standing there.

There are countless stories of people persevering despite facing multiple rejections. Think of any writer, scientist, artist or performer. *Everyone* has faced rejection at various points in their lives.

As Parker said, "There's no guarantee that everything you do [will bring] positive feedback. All you need is one indication of success." For instance, getting into one college out of 10 still makes you a success, he said. "Seize the positive statement," he said. In other words, focus on the positive feedback, and keep going.

Strengthening your self-esteem isn't easy. But these practical pointers can guide you in starting the process. If you think your self-esteem is shattered, work with a therapist to build it back up. It's never too late to feel good about yourself.

* – Note: It's a complex relationship. For instance, [this meta-analysis](#) found that low self-esteem predicted depression, but depression didn't predict low self-esteem as strongly.