How Does Low Self-Esteem Negatively Affect You?

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We live in a world where there is an epidemic of low self-esteem. It affects almost every aspect of our lives, from how we think about ourselves to the way we think about or react to life situations.

When negative influences and thoughts are prevalent — generated either from within ourselves or through others — it adversely affects the way we feel about ourselves. It also affects the experiences we have in our lives.

Over time this can lead to low self-esteem which can reduce the quality of a person's life in many different ways. Unchecked, low self-esteem may even lead to mental health issues such as anxiety and depression, sometimes with tragic results.

But what causes low self-esteem? There are many and varied reasons, but according to clinical psychologist Dr. Lars Madsen it's frequently traced to abusive or dysfunctional early years, the effects of which can persist well into adulthood. It can also be attributed to ongoing stressful life events (e.g., relationship breakdowns; financial troubles; poor treatment from a partner, parent or carer; being bullied; or being in an abusive relationship).

We all know our lives are full of challenges and triumphs, of ups and downs. In today's world we are only too aware there are many stressors that can cause us to doubt ourselves. And, as doubt creeps into our minds, "I can't do that" or "I will never overcome this" become mantras that become harder and harder to dismiss.

How often do you think, "if only I believed in myself"?

I recently spoke with psychiatrist Dr. Kevin Solomons, who wrote the book _Born to be Worthless: The Hidden Power of Low Self-Esteem_. He told me our self-esteem system mostly moves us to make healthy, constructive and adaptive life decisions, but can go wrong, just as any system can.

When it does go wrong, our failing (low) self-esteem can get us to make self-destructive decisions such as tolerating mistreatment or harming ourselves (by using drugs, becoming promiscuous, developing eating disorders or indulging in cosmetic surgery), or harming others (bullying, cheating) in an effort either to make others love us or to numb us to the pain of our own worthlessness.

Any negative life event or reaction can cause us to doubt ourselves. We all have times when things do not go as we think they should. The world can feel lonely in trying to find the right resources to help us at these times — everything can be daunting and even confusing. Often we place too much credibility on the negativity we have around us.

The most important lesson I have finally learned from my own life's challenges is that it's not external events that have the most profound effect on our self-esteem. It is how we view our own life and life's events. Ultimately, it's the inner belief we have in ourselves that guides our journey. Do we really believe we deserve to live in a bad relationship? Do we really believe we deserve to be mentally or physically abused? Is our negative belief in ourselves keeping us in these negative environments?

In life we are all constantly faced with challenges and changes. As we slowly begin to believe in ourselves, we can discover that although we cannot change our past experiences, we can change the way we think about them. As a result, we can change not only how we think about ourselves, but also identify a way to a better future.

As Viktor Frankl (1905 – 1997), psychiatrist and Holocaust-survivor famously said in his book *Man's Search for Meaning*, "[E]verything can be taken from a man but one thing; the last of the human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."