



12-Step Guide to Boosting Self-Esteem

A valuable resource for
creative artists, performing
artists, and speakers



Statistics: Who Has Low
Self-Esteem?

What Are the Symptoms of
Low Self-Esteem?

How is Healthy
Self-Esteem Beneficial?

What Are the Twelve Steps
for Boosting Self-Esteem?

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Introduction

According to recent studies, anxiety, stress, depression, and low self-image or low self-esteem are on the rise. All of us have moments when we feel less confident and doubt ourselves or question our looks, abilities, and actions. This is the normal process of facing everyday human challenges. However, sometimes low self-esteem can prevent us from performing at our highest capacity and achieving our goals. Current research studies have discovered prevalence and common symptoms of low self-esteem, high-self-esteem benefits, and twelve proven tips for boosting self-esteem.

Who Has Low Self -Esteem?

Studies tell us that we are not born with low self-esteem and lack of confidence. Infants, toddlers, and young children gain confidence by being able to make successful choices and decisions. It is essential to praise small successes. However, if parents applaud every effort, they deny children the opportunity to solve problems. Encouraging problem-solving during early childhood helps to develop confidence and healthy self-esteem.



Confidence and self-esteem develop over time. Low self-esteem is particularly prevalent in the teenage years. 70% of teenage girls believe they don't measure up in some way or are less capable, less attractive, or less talented than others. This includes relationships with schoolmates, friends, and family members. 20% of teens experience clinical depression before reaching adulthood. 44% of girls are attempting to lose weight.

Over 70% of teenage girls, 15 to 17 years of age, reported they would avoid normal daily activities, such as attending school, because of low self-esteem. 75% of girls with low self-esteem reported engaging in harmful activities, such as cutting, bullying, smoking, drinking, or eating disorders. Surveys show that **85% of the world's population** is affected by low self-esteem. It is one of the most common worldwide traits.



Fear of public speaking or “glossophobia” is commonly experienced with social anxiety and low self-esteem. Symptoms include sweating, accelerated heart rate, trembling, shaking, dizziness, nausea, and even vomiting. Many say it is similar to “stage fright” or “flight or fight response.”

Low self-esteem, and lack of confidence, and stage fright are particularly common with **public speakers, creative artists, performers, and presenters**. Studies estimate that more than 50% of performers experience stage fright, lack of confidence, and low self-esteem. Those most commonly reporting stage fright are between 35 and 45 years of age, but it affects people of all ages.

Famous actors, singers, speakers, and other creative artists are not exempt from **lack of confidence, low self-esteem, fear of public speaking, or stage fright**. For example, the Grammy award-winning artist, Adele, openly shares her struggles, reporting that she experiences stage fright before, during, and after each performance. Panic, lack of confidence, fear-induced illness is not uncommon for many public presenters. So, what are the symptoms, how do you know if you have it and what can be done about it?

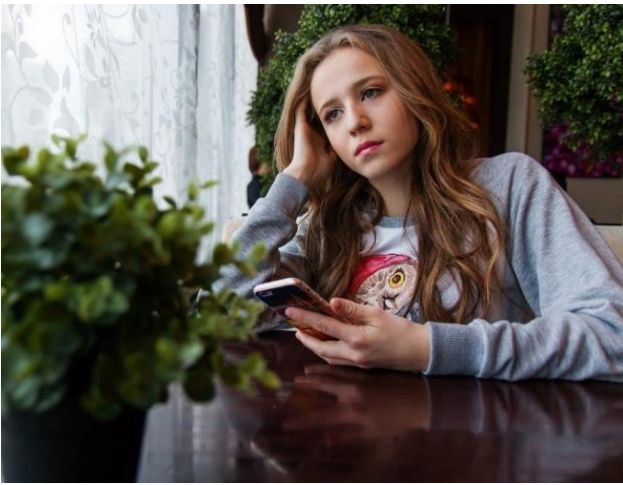
What are the Symptoms of Low Self-Esteem?

Low self-esteem can be a serious, life-threatening problem and prevent us from achieving our dreams. Chronic stress, lack of confidence and low self-esteem can result in severe **stress-related illnesses** and minimize the quality of life. Some of the symptoms and challenges of low self-esteem or low self-image may include:

1. Self-doubt, unable to see one's good qualities, talents, skills, and frequently focusing on the negative aspects of oneself or one's life.
2. Caring for others more than oneself; living a martyred life



3. Not taking necessary steps to care for oneself, neglecting basic hygiene and self-care.
4. Worrying obsessively about mistreating others.
5. Failing to trust oneself and having low expectations
6. Being shy, isolated or withdrawn socially
7. Feeling inappropriately overwhelmed with anxiety, panic, worry or stress
8. Experiencing fear of failure, or fear of success, based on a lack of self-confidence
9. Speaking badly, making unkind and critical remarks about oneself
10. Clinical depression and/or long-lasting episodes of sadness
11. Fearfully caught in a rut, eating the same foods, practicing the same daily routine
12. Never finishing a project, accumulating multiple unfinished projects, hoarding, and living in cluttered, messy surroundings



13. Obsessed with harmful, frightening, or painful media communities and communications (TV, movies, news, chat groups, etc.)
14. Avoiding answering friendly phone messages, emails, texts or other communications
15. Inability to receive compliments and misinterpreting comments; believing others are judgmental, critical, and changing the compliment into something negative ("Oh, this? It is really old.")
16. Engaging in gossip, blame, or complaining-centered conversations
17. An inability to fit in and a lack of social conformity
18. Not knowing one's opinions, preferences, and joys in life and consistently changing one's intentions and choices to match those of others
19. Avoiding new opportunities or new challenges
20. Suffering from severe **eating disorders** such as bulimia or anorexia nervosa

How is Healthy Self-Esteem Beneficial?

A positive self-image and high self-esteem help us know when to make healthy changes in our lives, such as:

1. Taking necessary steps to provide oneself with **adequate personal hygiene** and daily care (showering, brushing teeth, trimming nails, wearing clean clothes, keeping a tidy house, eating healthy, balanced meals, etc.)

2. Getting to a doctor or other health practitioner when in need of professional healthcare services, therapy, and treatment (dentist, optometrist, general practitioner, nutritionist, chiropractor, massage therapist, etc.)
3. **Getting needed training or guidance from a certified coach**, teacher, or guide, taking classes, attending webinars, listening to podcasts, or reading and studying to improve oneself
4. Successfully removing oneself from harmful situations in everyday life and especially in emergencies
5. Being fully capable and ready to **love** others (family, friends, spouses, co-workers)
6. Being able to quickly and easily list positive qualities about oneself (kind, incredible basketball player, cute nose, etc.)
7. **Exploring new environments** and social settings (the opera, dancing, singing lessons, golf, etc.)
8. Stepping forward into new, healthy, personal relationships or life situations (going on a date, signing up for tutoring, or quitting a stifling or unsupportive work situation)
9. **Changing your life** to be the person you want to be (business owner, artist, musician, writer, etc.)
10. Setting realistic and achievable goals and regularly revising or editing them, without guilt or shame
11. Wholeheartedly receiving and giving compliments without insulting oneself ("Yes, I do look great in this new dress. Thank you." "Your presentation was awesome! I'm so glad I came.")
12. Feeling confident, comfortable, and unconcerned with the opinions or judgments of others. ("Thanks for the feedback. I'll think about what you said.")
13. **Expecting the highest and best** of oneself and taking the next steps to achieve that dream
14. Being sure of your opinions, preferences, and joys in life (e.g., you know you like pizza with pineapple, but you don't like cold pineapple; or you know you like piano music, but you're not crazy about the sound of a trumpet)
15. Feeling happy, joyful, and grateful for the many lessons and blessings--*even when times are tough*
16. **Trusting and believing in oneself** fearlessly with confidence, regardless of the situation ("I know I can do this. I'm not giving up.")



17. **Regularly scheduling down time** to relax and have FUN!
18. Being able to forgive yourself and others for past mistakes and hurts. Knowing this is part of life. You are human, you are real, and not perfect. Your imperfections are your strongest assets.
19. Being successful and productive. Reaching out to others and giving back to friends, family, and the community in a healthy, balanced way.
20. **Knowing when to back away** and stop continuing doing something when it becomes unproductive and unhealthy; being comfortable saying "No."

What Are the Twelve Steps for Boosting Self-Esteem?

There are a lot of programs out there for helping others BOOST and RESET their self-esteem. It can be very helpful to study these tips, but **the bottom line is to do the work.** Here are twelve steps proven to be successful in boosting self-esteem and self-confidence and helping others achieve their dreams and get the life they want.



1. **Set goals** - One way to build self-esteem is to set easily attainable goals. It feels great to check off accomplishments at the end of the day. Start with simple steps: mop the floor, call a friend, study one chapter.

If you have more challenging goals (e.g., finishing an extensive project requiring several weeks), break them into smaller achievable steps.

Begin by designing a plan. Draw out what you plan to accomplish. Create a workspace. Gather materials. Set a date to start. Write the date on your calendar. Send yourself reminders. Don't feel like a failure if you miss your goal deadline. Start over. Tell yourself, "I am making progress. I will make it happen." You can do this if you start with creating a step-by-step plan.

2. **Be mindful** - If you see negative qualities in yourself, taking steps to be mindful is a critical technique for boosting self-esteem. Those who lack confidence and lack high self-esteem frequently have no conscious awareness of their "mind-talk." Mindfulness helps reset the self-image button. Each time you notice yourself thinking

a negative thought, replace it with a positive one. Each time you notice an optimistic viewpoint, say to yourself, “Good thinking. This feels great. Good job.” For example, if you are thinking, “I can never do anything right,” replace that thought with, “I am highly capable of succeeding.” or “I can do anything I put my mind to,” or “I am grateful for the many blessings in my life.” Then create a plan and take it step-by-step. Another technique is to read positive affirmations before going to sleep, and upon waking in the morning, or listening to positive affirmation apps, videos, podcasts, webinars, or audiobooks.

3. **Face and embrace** - Raising self-esteem includes facing darkness and pain. Sometimes low self-esteem develops from a history of failure, abuse, harsh parenting, lack of praise or compliments, frequent teasing or bullying, or trauma. 87% of those bullied felt it negatively affected their self-esteem. A trained counselor, psychologist, minister, or psychotherapist can help face, accept, and embrace difficult past experiences. When you are ready, a certified coach can help set goals and step forward to achieve success.



For many people, journal-writing is an effective daily practice. Some have found it helpful to write past traumas or negative thoughts down on paper and then destroy them. If you are faith-driven, turn to your spiritual practice, surrendering in faith, prayer, meditation, or contemplation. Others have found it helpful to look in the mirror and talk to oneself. If your thoughts are saying, "Your teeth are crooked," or "You can't do this," listen to that voice and shift to gratitude. Say, "Thank you for trying to help me. I hear you. I am listening. I care and love you. It's okay. I am here for you now. You are lovable and valuable." Facing and embracing negativity can take time. Be patient with yourself and know you can get help from a professional if you need it.

4. **Make a love list** - Begin making a list of things that you like about yourself. If this is difficult, start with a simple list such as, "I have a pretty smile," or "I like my shoes," or "I enjoy sitting with my cat." Write down as many things as you can think of to

boost your ego. It might be helpful to close your eyes and imagine a happy, peaceful time in your life. What are your happy memories? What did you like about yourself and your life at that time? You can recreate that moment and experience happiness, love, and appreciation for yourself right now.

5. **Find a coach or buddy** - Studies show that people are more successful at making changes in their lives when they have a coach or study buddy. Find a more knowledgeable and experienced person who can hold you accountable, encourage you, and see your talents and skills as you begin setting new goals and making changes in your life.



Coaches, teachers, or trainers are helpful because they are less likely to pass judgment or try to fix or change you. They are more likely to listen carefully to your goals, work with you to find your way, and help you set your own pace.

On the other hand, family members are more likely to try to persuade or encourage you to make the change they believe is best for you. Family love is fundamental. However, sometimes it may be difficult for those closest to you to practice detachment and allow you the freedom you need to achieve success.

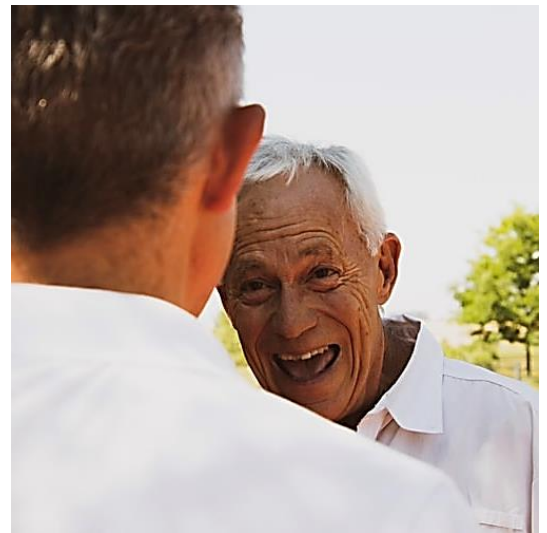
Interview your coach or teacher before committing. Remember that you have something valuable and essential to offer the world. You **deserve to have someone working with you who genuinely cares and puts you first.**

6. **Get creative** - Everyone needs a creative or expressive outlet. Trying something new is a great energy booster and helps to reset self-image and raise self-esteem. Make a list of new activities to help you build confidence. You can join a support group, take a class, attend a concert, go to a play, or get a new pet. If you prefer to stay at home, you might decide to learn a new skill, such as another language, taking an online art or music course, or even taking up dancing and learning a few steps in the privacy of your home. Find your tribe and enjoy yourself.

- 7. Ignore fixers and changers** – It is human nature for people to be uncomfortable around those who are suffering, angry, off-balance, depressed, complaining, or exhibiting other symptoms of low self-esteem. If you have low self-esteem, chances are you will find yourself in the company of someone who is trying to "fix you" by giving helpful tips to change your mood. Forgive them and let them be. If you are feeling down in the dumps, and someone tries to be encouraging, saying, "Hey, cheer up. Stop being so hard on yourself. I think you are wonderful," you can say, "Thank you," and let it go. Often these positive remarks aggravate the situation. It is rare for a person with low self-confidence to immediately shift into joy and happiness.

Try not to feel as if you are failing at "being" cheerful or confident when given this type of advice. You are magnificent. It is appropriate to feel sad, fearful, unconfident, or apprehensive sometimes.

The best approach around someone with low self-esteem is to let that person move at their own pace, ask questions, talk, and offer advice only if they ask for it. You are fine the way you are. And so are they.



- 8. Choose positive people** - Don't spend time around people who respond negatively toward you and your life choices. For example, you may have friends or family members who make you feel worse about yourself by criticizing or making demeaning remarks about you. If possible, eliminate all contact with these people, or begin spending less time, and surround yourself with people who recognize your remarkable golden qualities.

Seek out people who leave you feeling better about yourself. If you cannot find anyone in your current situation or surroundings, then seek out new surroundings. If you are in an abusive relationship and need help, you may wish to contact the domestic violence hotline, www.thehotline.org/help/, the emotional abuse hotline, www.crisistextline.org/, or the National Child Abuse Hotline www.childhelp.org/.

- 9. Help someone else** – Research shows charity is a proven way of raising self-esteem. Volunteer to help your favorite charity, such as the Red Cross, Meals on Wheels, the SPCA, the Boys Club, etc. If you cannot leave your home or have physical limitations ask if you can serve in other ways, such as working online or making phone calls. Call a friend or family member and offer kind words of encouragement and support, spend time with a brother, your husband, children, mother, or other loved one, make a donation to a worthy cause, send a letter or email of gratitude to a friend or an organization. Share specific instances, qualities, or actions for which you are grateful.

Communicate online or in chats or text messages to send helpful messages of encouragement. Try this with strangers online, where public input is open and encouraged. Be specific and direct. For example, saying, "You're a great person," is not as effective as saying, "When you shared about taking care of your grandmother, it inspired me to do the same. You are truly kind and selfless. Thank you." If you specifically mention positive traits to others, you will gain skills and better see those traits in yourself.



- 10. Decorate with love** - Keep your home clean and tidy, and decorate with happy thoughts, words, and memories. If you are faith-driven, post messages of faith. If you have friends and family, take photos of yourself in different settings with loved ones, and keep these reminders around you in your home. Of course, this will not be effective if you toss your decorations in a messy pile on your desk.

Spend money on an attractive display with unique frames or wall hangings. Looking at photo memories or inspirational messages thoughtfully displayed throughout your home sends a powerful message: You are loved!

You might also choose to purchase custom wall decals with positive affirmations. They are easy to peel and apply to the wall and very inexpensive. Choose messages such as "I can do anything!" "I am strong, courageous, and free!" or "I believe in me!"

- 11. Take action** - Once you have determined your strengths, then take the next step. If you decide you are a talented writer, submit an essay or join a writing group. For example, if you are good at knitting, you can: knit socks for a charitable organization, teach a child to knit or start a knitting circle.

If you love to sing or play a musical instrument, you can join a local community chorus or volunteer to play music for your church. Choose a goal that makes you happy and take your next step.

Raising the bar one step is a way to reset your self-esteem and create the life you want. Take it slowly and raise it a notch. When you are ready, take that next step. You've got this. You are in control and can change your life.



- 12. Take good care of yourself** - Make sure to get enough sleep, physical exercise, eat healthy foods, and keep your home in good order. You cannot expect to feel good if you aren't taking the necessary steps to care for yourself. Always be kind and forgiving. Never use life as an opportunity for dwelling on regret and shame. Self-care is something everyone must work with daily. If your life situation is chaotic, let go of guilt, embarrassment, or despair and take baby steps. You will succeed.

Some communities have "job banks" or barter practices where members exchange services for no fee. Start with one area of your life, one step at a time. You might begin by searching for a counselor, coach, nutritionist, exercise coach, social worker, or professional organizer. Take an inventory of your life. Ask yourself: "In what way am I not taking care of myself or my responsibilities? What area of my life needs more loving care?" Then, if you need help, search for people who have the unique skills and talents to assist you best.

About the Author

Jean Voice Dart grew up in Illinois's midwestern farmlands, listening to crickets and catching lightning bugs. As a child, she drew pictures, composed music, played piano and flute, and wrote poetry and short stories.

As a Registered Music Therapist, Credentialed Special Education Teacher (K-12), Certified Expressive Arts Grief and Trauma Coach, Certified Adult Continuing Education Teacher, and Certified Art Therapy Practitioner, she has been **working with creative and performing artists for more than forty years.**



Jean's lifelong experience is rich and diverse. She directed a choir of blind performers, taught wheelchair dancing, coached juvenile delinquent teenagers in dramatic arts and dance, taught high school English and Creative Writing, worked with the county Artists in Schools Program, the Very Special Arts Festival, and Special Olympics. Jean hosted a local television program, "Making Miracles Happen," and performed for audiences of over six thousand people. She is a **survivor and "thrivor" of low-self-esteem** as a result of multiple childhood and adult traumas. Jean passionately believes the **creative and expressive arts are vital** to health and well-being.

You can currently find Jean teaching and coaching students online in private and group expressive arts sessions. She is currently enjoying her life in California with her husband Matt, dog Pumpkin, and a variety of neighboring birds. Jean has authored multiple books, including the *Bully-Busting Adventures* series for children and the *Courageous, Creative Conquerors* series for adults.

To receive more information, make an appointment, or **apply for a FREE thirty-minute session** with Jean, visit www.jeanvoicedart.com.

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