

ones. For example, replace the message “I made a stupid mistake, and I’m no good at this job,” with “Yes, I made a mistake, but I’ve learned from it, and now I can do a better job”. Begin each day by looking in the mirror and giving yourself a positive message. The following affirmations can help you to work toward a positive self-image:

- I respect myself and others.
- I am lovable and likable.
- I am confident, and it shows.
- I care about myself.
- I am creating loving, healthy relationships.
- I am a good friend to myself and others.
- I accept myself just as I am.
- I look great.
- Life is good, and I like being a part of it.

Sometimes, however, it takes more than self-talk to deal with low self-esteem. If feelings of low self-esteem persist, it may be helpful to speak to a professional who is skilled in working with self-esteem problems.

## HOW DO I CONTACT THE CENTER FOR WORK AND FAMILY LIFE (CWFL)?

If you are a USC staff or faculty member and are interested in scheduling an appointment with a counselor or receiving information regarding resources and referrals, phone the CWFL at (213) 821-0800. If you are an immediate family member of a USC employee, you may also phone the Center directly to request services. CWFL services are available at all USC sites by special appointment.

The Center for Work and Family Life is open Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

IMPROVING  
SELF-ESTEEM

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# IMPROVING SELF-ESTEEM



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# IMPROVING SELF-ESTEEM

## What is self-esteem?

Self-esteem is how we value ourselves; it's how we perceive our worth to the world and how valuable we think we are to others. Self-esteem affects our trust in others, our relationships, our work – nearly every part of our lives. Positive self-esteem gives us the strength and flexibility to take charge of our lives and grow from our mistakes without the fear of rejection.

Following are some outward signs of positive self-esteem:

- Confidence
- Self-direction
- Nonblaming behavior
- An awareness of personal strengths
- An ability to make mistakes and learn from them
- An ability to accept mistakes from others
- Optimism
- An ability to solve problems
- An independent and cooperative attitude
- Feeling comfortable with a wide range of emotions
- An ability to trust others
- A good sense of personal limitations
- Good self-care
- The ability to say “no”

## What is low self-esteem?

Low self-esteem is a condition that keeps individuals from realizing their full potential. A person with low self-esteem feels unworthy, incapable, and incompetent. In fact, because the person with low self-esteem feels so poorly about him or herself, these feelings may actually cause the person's continued low self-esteem. Here are some signs of low self-esteem:

- Negative view of life
- Perfectionist attitude
- Mistrusting others—even those who show signs of affection
- Blaming behavior
- Fear of taking risks
- Feelings of being unloved and unlovable
- Dependence—letting others make decisions
- Fear of being ridiculed

## How does low self-esteem start?

Nobody is born with low self-esteem; it's something that is learned. It is the result of filtering the opinions, comments, looks, suggestions, and actions of those around us through a person's own feelings and self-image.

If a person grows up with critical, disapproving parents, for example, that person may learn that he or she can never do well

enough. The child may grow up to be very successful in some areas of life, but filters out the positive, and concentrates on what he or she did not achieve. If a child grows up with neglectful parents, he or she may grow up feeling unworthy of care. And this feeling may last a lifetime even though others show their love and affection for the person.

This doesn't mean that individuals with low self-esteem receive only negative comments or reactions from those around them. It means that, although everyone receives positive and negative messages, the person with low self-esteem filters out the good and hears only the bad. And, individuals with low self-esteem will tend to “live up to” the low expectations they feel those around them have. In doing so, they reinforce the unhealthy ideas and behaviors they have developed over the years. Their low self-esteem becomes “second nature,” and they may even unconsciously sabotage the good, creative aspects of their personalities to become the people they perceive themselves to be.

## How can you raise low self-esteem?

Feelings of low self-esteem often build up over a lifetime, and letting go of ingrained feelings and behaviors is not an easy task. It may take time, hard work, and it may require professional counseling. But there are some simple, positive-thinking techniques that can be used to help improve self-esteem. These are called *affirmations*. Using affirmations to stop negative self-talk is a simple, yet positive way to help increase self-esteem. Affirmations are encouraging messages we can give ourselves every day until they become part of our feelings and beliefs. Affirmations work best when a person is relaxed, but since people are often upset when they are giving themselves negative self-messages, they may need to counter negative messages with positive