How to Cope With Sensitivity and Self-Esteem Issues

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Depression and Sensitivity

When people think of depression, they may think of the established signs and symptoms that are described in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). The book, created and revised by the American Psychiatric Association, outlines the expected symptoms including:

- Depressed mood
- Changes in sleep
- Changes in eating with decreased weight
- Lack of motivation and energy
- Decreased interest in pleasurable activities
- Feelings of excessive guilt and worthlessness
- Increased thoughts of death
- Decreased attention and concentration
- Feeling sped up or slowed down

Although these are the classically understood symptoms of depression, there is a level of individual and unique symptoms someone may experience during a major depressive episode. For example, some have periods experiencing psychotic symptoms where they will see or hear things that are not there.

Other people will have symptoms related to one of the nine above, but present in a different way. One such example of this is increased sensitivity.

Certainly, there are many positives associated with being appropriately sensitive, as it indicates that someone is thoughtful and compassionate, but having too much can lead to unwanted effects. This level of sensitivity can be described as a being easily insulted or harmed by the actions or words of others. Here, the harm is only psychological but still quite damaging.

Sensitivity and Self-Esteem

Excessive guilt and feelings of worthlessness are common symptoms listed by the DSM. If you investigate these symptoms and begin to expand upon them, you look to self-esteem. Self-esteem is a measure of how well you like yourself, and it goes by many names like:

- Self-worth
- Confidence
- Self-assurance
- Self-respect
- Pride

People with depression commonly have low self-esteem because they feel high levels of guilt and worthlessness. If you feel like a terrible person that does terrible things, liking yourself is an impossibility.

So, what does this have to do with sensitivity?

Since people with depression have low self-esteem, they are interested in gaining praise and validation from outside sources. If someone in their life gives a compliment, it will help offset the negativity they feel about themselves, at least momentarily.

If someone makes a statement or behaves in a way that is neutral or slightly critical, the person with depression can inaccurately perceive this as very negative. They need large amounts of praise at high frequency just to feel normal. Anything less than this level will not fit their need and trigger more feelings of depression.

Someone with depression and low self-esteem grades all feedback on a curve, where each score is significantly lower. Something very positive will feel neutral. Something neutral will feel negative, and something negative will feel unbearably catastrophic.

Next page: how to improve your self-esteem to improve your sensitivity

Sensitivity and Self-Esteem

This sensitivity may be an attempt to train people in your life to only give you positive reinforcement, but this system is associated with negatives including:

- Other people do not feel comfortable being direct and honest with you
- Your relationships become more superficial and unrewarding
- Others do not feel like they are benefiting from the relationship
- You assign responsibility for your feelings to others instead of yourself
- Your mood, self-esteem and sensitivity continue to worsen over time

Improving Self-Esteem to Improve Sensitivity

The final two on the previous list are the most disconcerting because you will continue wasting time and resources trying to modify the behaviors or communication of others. Instead, you will be well-served to put the responsibility squarely on your own shoulders.

This may seem overwhelming or frightening at first, but if you can build consistency, you will learn to make yourself feel better than anyone else could. Additionally, permitting yourself to feel good will end the emotional rollercoaster associated with low self-esteem.

Do you want to feel better and stay better? Here’s how:

Assess Your Beliefs

Now that you have taken responsibility for your feelings and self-esteem, you can begin to retrace the steps that brought you to this place. What has damaged your self-esteem? Who were the biggest perpetrators? How long has this been the case? By understanding the roots of your beliefs, you can engage in interventions that are more likely to work and work efficiently.

Monitor Your Self-Talk

Self-talk is the conversation that you have each day with yourself. The statements that you make to yourself have a major impact on how you feel and the behaviors you perform. People with low self-esteem typically have self-talk that is centered on ideas of worthlessness, failure and pessimism. If these statements continue, you will only

feel worse. There must be change at this level for progress to occur.

Limit the Views of Others

For too long, you have been placing excessive value on the opinions of others only to see your self-esteem slide. At this point, you will benefit from filtering the feedback you receive. A compliment from a friend cannot have the power to drastically improve your day, just as a criticism from a friend cannot destroy your day. What you think of yourself matters much more than the views of others.

Give Compliments

What do you like about yourself? What are you good at? What are your strengths and goals? Focusing your self-talk on positive aspects of your personality and your life will begin to change the negative flow of self-esteem. Giving yourself a compliment will feel foreign after being focused on the opinions of others for so long, but give it time. Increased compliments will trigger a chain reaction to self-talk, self-esteem, sensitivity and depression as it makes each component more desirable.

Find Pleasure

Only so much can be done in your mind. Engaging your body will boost the positive impact on self-esteem. Finding fun and pleasure in the world is possible no matter your situation. Go places and do things that you have been reluctant to do until now. You now know that the result will be worth the temporary discomfort.

It's true sensitivity is an issue connected to depression, but the link might surprise you. Rather than targeting sensitivity directly, work on your self-esteem to produce the results you seek. Along the way, take responsibility for how you feel. Doing so will place the power and control right where it belongs: in your hands.