Developing a Sense of Self-Worth When You Have Depression

by LANA BARHUM

The Relationship Between Self-Confidence and Depression

Having self-confidence isn't always easy, but most of us know what abilities we have, and we trust in things we know we are capable of. But when you depressed, self-confidence tends to be in short supply.

Depression does not allow self-confidence to flourish. Unfortunately, it is just one of the many cruel realities about living with depression.

Depression crushes your self-confidence and walks all over you. It makes self-belief (trust you have about your positive characteristics) non-existent and destroys self-esteem.

What Is Self-Confidence?

The term self-confidence refers to a feeling of assurance of your personal judgments, abilities, and characteristics. You develop and increase self-confidence by mastering certain activities and skills with time and experience.

Self-confidence is important in almost every part of our lives – in our careers, finding love, making friends, and even raising our children. And people who lack self-confidence struggle to succeed.

What Depression Does to Self-Confidence

Depression is much like a lying bully, filling your head with ideas that your worthless, or life doesn't matter, or that you are not good enough. It makes you small and overwhelmed, and it is hard to find trust in your abilities and in who you are when that lying voice is so convincing.

When depression makes you doubt what you once knew, you start to feel angry, and you beat yourself up over things you have no control over.

Being further self-critical increases depressive feelings and worsens lack of self-confidence. It makes everything – even stuff we never thought twice about before – seem daunting and impossible.

Self-Confidence vs. Self-Esteem

The terms self-confidence and self-esteem are often used interchangeably when people talk about how they feel about themselves. Although the two are similar, they are also different, and it important to understand the roles they play in our lives, especially as we work towards managing their effect on depression.

Self-esteem is how you feel about yourself overall, and translates in feeling satisfied with who you are as a human being, what abilities you have, and about working towards improvements and change. We develop self-esteem

from experience and situations that have shaped our lives and given us gained perspective.

Self-esteem helps build self-confidence, but self-confidence varies based on what we are doing. For example, you may have healthy and normal self-esteem, but you may lack confidence in things beyond your abilities, i.e., in preparing your taxes.

Loving oneself helps to improve self-esteem, which in turn can make it easier to be more self-confident. When you are self-confident, your self-esteem improves, so you are working on both at the same time.

Low self-esteem involves feeling as if you are not good enough, and for some people, it can be a pattern. Low self-esteem is most evident when you are depressed.

How Does Depression Affect Self-Esteem?

Research has shown self-esteem influences depression and depression decreases self-esteem. Negative feelings about yourself can make you pessimistic about yourself, about others, and even about the future, and that cycle can be pretty brutal.

In 2012, researchers from the University of Basel in Switzerland looked at various studies on depression and self-esteem.

What the Swiss researchers found was a strong relationship between self-esteem and depression, mainly that decreased self-esteem increased depressive symptoms. They also found some research that depression decreases self-esteem, but the evidence was minimal, especially in comparison with how low self-esteem fueled depression.

The Swiss researchers confirmed the importance of treatments that not only reduced depressive symptoms but also worked to improve self-esteem in depressed people.

Self-Esteem and Self-Confidence Can Improve, But There's a Catch

Just as depression can be treated, self-esteem and self-confidence can be improved.

It is important to note that self-confidence is based on specific things we learn and get good at. Lack of confidence comes from a lack of self-esteem, and low self-esteem can have some very negative consequences.

If someone lacks self-confidence, their self-esteem acts as a buffer to give rise to courage to try new things and feel good regardless of the outcomes. But people with low self-esteem have an inner critic that makes even attempting anything impossible because the critical voice makes you believe you can't succeed.

Therefore, developing and improving self-confidence requires learning to press the pause button on your inner critic.

Treating Depression and Confidence Issues

Talk therapy is very good at addressing specific issues, including self-esteem. It tends to help people gain a stronger sense of themselves and their abilities.

Therapists can help people with low-esteem become more self-aware, confident and even assertive. Learning to feel a sense of accomplishment offers a huge boost to self-esteem and a therapist can help you to identify specific actions that promote feelings of accomplishment.

Moreover, therapy can teach you how to be more self-compassionate. Practicing self-compassion means you understand that suffering, imperfection, and failure are part of the human experience and that you treat yourself in the same way you treat others when they need your love and support.

Improving Self-Esteem

Here are simple ways to nourish your self-esteem, feel better about yourself, and manage depression.

- **Recognize your talents**. We were all good at something, whether it's cooking, dancing, writing, or being a good friend. You should make every effort to do and enjoy what you are good at because these things will help to improve your mood and self-esteem.
- **Spend time with positive people**. If there are people in your life who bring you down, spend less time with them, or if you can, end those relationships. Seek out friendships with people who are positive and who appreciate you and your friendship.
- **Practice Self-Compassion**. Be gentle and kind to yourself, especially when your inner critic is screaming. Treat yourself in the way you would a friend who is feeling self-critical.
- **Speak Up**. Being assertive means, you expect from others the same respect you give them. You can start by not saying “yes” all the time because not standing up to yourself leads to anger, resentment, and feeling overburdened and depressed.
- **Challenge yourself**. Healthy self-esteem means trying new ways to challenge yourself, even if you feel nervous or afraid. Set goals, and work towards achieving them, because accomplishment is the best self-esteem booster.

If You are Still Struggling

If you have tried everything to boost self-esteem and self-confidence and improve depressive symptoms and you don’t see any positive differences, it is time to talk to someone you can trust.

Close friends, family members, religious leaders, your doctor or a therapist, can help you figure out what is holding you back. Act now and get the help you need before things get worse.