



Counselling & Coaching



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## HOW TO LIFT YOUR CONFIDENCE AND SELF ESTEEM

Thanks for downloading this free resource. Here you'll learn the differences (and similarities) in confidence and self-esteem and how low confidence and self-esteem develop. Then we'll look at a practical 5-step process (used by myself and my clients) to bring your levels of confidence and self-esteem back under your control.

Fortunately, there are many ways to change our confidence and self-esteem, this method describes just one of them. It's written in a 'work book' style so you can try it out for yourself. **If low confidence and self-esteem are something you're struggling with I encourage you to work through the questions.** Information is only useful if we **use** it. If you want the results – you'll have to try it! And remember – it doesn't have to be perfect, it just needs to be good enough.

I hope you find this helpful, if you've got any questions or feedback you can contact me via my website at <http://www.kirstymcgovern.co.uk>

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## PART 1: WHAT IS CONFIDENCE?

### Confidence is an 'outside job'

It's how able you are to do something in the world – apply for a job, have *that* difficult conversation or ask someone out on a date. Having **a good enough level of confidence** depends on two things:-

1) **Seeing yourself as being successful** (or at least having a good chance). Even though the outcome might be uncertain, you have enough hope for success to motivate you to act. *And:-*

2) **Knowing you can pick yourself up if it doesn't work out.** You don't feel overwhelmed by the thought of *not* succeeding so you can act without it feeling like too much of a risk.

### What stops us from acting?

Questioning, indecision, making excuses and 'reasoning' ourselves out of it (despite having good reason to do it) are all forms of procrastination. So is setting high, unrealistic goals that put us off before we've started. **But underneath all that is fear.** You might be able to see you have a chance of success but you're overwhelmed by the thought of *not* succeeding. You have no idea how to pick yourself up if it doesn't work out; the embarrassment feels too much and you can't bear what others might say or think.

*The lower your confidence, the less likely you are to try new things... so you don't get the opportunity to see if your low level of confidence is justified.*

This is why confidence is an 'outside job' – **it relates to what you say and do in the world and, importantly, what others may think and say about you.** The lower your confidence the less likely you are to try new things, which means you stay safe but you don't get the opportunity to see if your low level of confidence is actually justified and you're left with that nagging feeling of "what if...?"

## PART 2: WHAT IS SELF-ESTEEM?

### Self Esteem is an 'inside job'

Self-esteem has little to do with the outside world; it's more personal than that. It's how we 'esteem' (or value) ourselves. It can be tricky to understand as (unlike confidence) it's based on things we can't see – it's not how able we feel to do something; **it's how we feel about ourselves.**

Although confidence and self-esteem are linked, it's possible to have one without the other. You may have a great job or family life that other's admire but inside it's possible to feel hollow and empty or be living with a feeling of

*If you're going through a tough time and experiencing lots of difficult emotions it can be hard to hold onto good feelings about yourself.*

worthlessness and a nagging fear of 'being found out'.

### What does high self-esteem look like?

It's not so much what it look likes (although the outcome of high self-esteem can be higher confidence) it's about how it *feels*. You feel it in those times when the distractions of the world stop and you're alone with your thoughts about yourself. **If that feels like an uncomfortable place, your self-esteem is in need of some work.**

### What does high self-esteem look like?

Very few of us feel good about ourselves all the time because we're responding to life events. But those with a good-enough level self-esteem (like those with a good-enough level of confidence) know what to do when things don't go to plan. When they feel disappointed, frustrated or let down they remember something fundamental; **those feelings are not who they are.** They can separate their feelings relating to a situation from their feelings about who they are and recognise good people have bad days too.

### Is it really that straight-forward?



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**Straight-forward ,yes, but not always easy.** Think of it this way; when something good happens – either something you've worked for like a promotion or something unexpected like a lottery win, you feel good about it and are more likely to see yourself in a positive light. Similarly, if you're going through a tough time and experiencing lots of difficult emotions it can be hard to hold onto good feelings about yourself. Without a solid plan to take care of your emotions, you're dependent on life's events and it's easy to feel powerless and out of control.

### **So good-enough self-esteem depends on how we handle our feelings?**

Our feelings *and* our thoughts. We don't choose our emotions; they're our response to events and when we understand how they work we can learn to let them come and go. But our thoughts are something we *can* have control over **when we learn how to work out the thoughts that help us from the thoughts that don't.**

So **self-esteem is a measure of how able we are to exercise choice in our inner world** (the Buddhist word for this is self-mastery) rather than an external measure of value. It's pretty much impossible to measure (or compare) the innate value of one person over another when everyone has different abilities, qualities and a unique perspective on life.

## PART 3: HOW DO LOW CONFIDENCE & SELF-ESTEEM DEVELOP?

### The 3 main ways low confidence and self-esteem develop and 'stick' are:-

1) **From our experiences.** Our brains are wired to learn through experience as a time-saving device and (unchallenged) **our beliefs about ourselves and the world grow out of our experiences.** This can work against us if we've had a run of bad luck or a difficult childhood. Difficulties as children can make us more vulnerable to psychological and emotional problems later in life as beliefs and patterns are established early. You may not be able to remember certain events but they can leave their trace in the ways you think and feel today.

2) **Listening to fear / seeking safety.** If you don't deal with difficult experiences (and the thoughts and feelings they produce) all that's left is to 'shut them off' and not think about them. You've heard people talk about 'moving on' but if **you haven't dealt with something you take it with you.**

And it's something you begin to fear reopening.

This can take the form of avoiding certain people or situations (maybe conflict or speaking up) but what's actually happening is your mind is trying to keep you safe in the short-term from something you've learnt to fear.

*A sign of healthy emotional and psychological maturity can be our curiosity to consider a different viewpoint.*

**The short-term goal of seeking safety becomes more important than the longer-term goal of achieving your potential** or learning more about the world and connecting with the people in it. As a result you encounter fewer and fewer situations where your negative beliefs about yourself can be challenged and possibly proved wrong. Therefore the negative belief sticks and overtime, almost without realising it, you come to see it as fact.





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3) **The absence of an alternative view.** One of the ways you can tell if you're coming from the viewpoint of a core belief (as opposed to an objective viewpoint) **is a lack of balance in your thinking.** It's when you 'just know' you don't deserve a better job, house or relationship. **Our minds might feel comfortable with 'black and white' but that doesn't help us** in a world full of 'grey areas'; where 'good people' make mistakes and 'bad people' may not always be bad. Where 'good' things can have downsides and 'bad' situations can sometimes help us learn. A sign of healthy emotional and psychological maturity can be our curiosity to at least consider a different viewpoint.

## PART 4: 5-STEP PROCESS TO LIFT CONFIDENCE AND SELF-ESTEEM

### STEP 1: Awareness

**Get really clear on what your beliefs about yourself are and where they've come from.**

By now you've learnt your core beliefs come from somewhere. This first step will help **you trace back where your beliefs come from**. By doing this we can start to understand the importance of cause and effect, rather than viewing our thoughts or beliefs as concrete facts.

For example –

**My belief might be I'm bad with numbers and that's just how it is.**

When I think about where it comes from I remember the times I couldn't add something up or work something out. When I think about where it started I remember painful maths lessons where I felt embarrassed and ashamed that I couldn't keep up with the class.

Or:-

**I believe I can never have a good relationship.**

When I think about where this comes from I remember painful relationship break-ups. When I think about where it started I might remember my first relationship as a teenager (which felt like a disaster) or a difficulty in my relationship with a parent when I was a child that was never quite resolved. Or maybe as a child I witnessed the adults around me having problems and possibly separating.

This is a really important point here – we don't just learn from our own experiences we also learn from the experiences of those around us, especially if we were children at the time and unable to understand exactly what was going on.



**Your Turn:**

- 1) **Write down 2 or 3 beliefs about yourself just as you hear them in your head – it's usually something like I can never... or I'm just....** (if you need more space, continue on another piece of paper)

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- 2) For each one, write down **1) The most recent time** a situation happened that confirmed the belief and **2) The time furthest back** when you can remember it happening.

Belief 1: \_\_\_\_\_

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Belief 2: \_\_\_\_\_

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Belief 3: \_\_\_\_\_



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## Step 2: Curiosity

**Take 'you' out of it and look at those situations as if they had happened to someone else.**

Building on the increased awareness you gained in step 1, it's now time to take it further and consider the other factors involved. This can be difficult so look at it as if a friend were telling you the story – what might you say to them?

For Example you might say to your friend;

You didn't pass your maths because you couldn't understand what the teacher was saying. Maybe you were bored or felt stupid. You were too embarrassed to ask for help, or if you did ask, you were too embarrassed to say you still didn't get it.

So alternative reasons might be:-

Reason 1 – Maybe the style of teaching didn't suit me.

Reason 2 – It didn't interest me and I didn't understand that it would be important later in life.

Reason 3 – I struggled to control my emotional reaction so it was easier to shut down and avoid it.

2<sup>nd</sup> Example:-

You've never been taught how to deal with conflict in a relationship. You may have got angry and shouted or felt hurt and didn't say what you were



thinking. The partners you've had may also have had problems – your last partner was still angry over how his ex treated him and there weren't many times you were able to talk things over calmly and reach a compromise.

Reason 1 – I wasn't taught how to deal with conflict.

Reason 2 – My emotional responses felt out of my control – even though I knew they weren't helping.

Reason 3 – My ex had his own problems and hadn't learnt how to deal with conflict or his emotions either.

By stepping back from the emotional response you give yourself a chance to build a more balanced view. Allow this new broader view to sit alongside the old belief that you're bad at something because there's something wrong with you that can't be changed. You don't have to believe it's true at this point (why would you?) You just have to have enough curiosity to give it a go.

### Your Turn:

Deep breath for this one; step back and allow yourself to consider alternative explanations. Take **one** of the beliefs above and think of the situation as if your friend were telling you about it.

**List three alternative responses or reasons** such as the other people involved, what your friend (you!) might have been thinking and feeling or what she / he (you) knows now that they might not have known then:-

1) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Step 3: SELF-CARE

#### Now's the time to build a new relationship with you.

When I talk about self-care many people don't understand it straight away. It's not something we're used to hearing about but it's fundamental if we want to change anything and **might be the reason your previous attempts at change haven't worked.**

The good news is you've already started with steps 1 and 2; the new understanding you've gained can help you be kinder to yourself in those moments when negative beliefs hit; those times when things don't go to plan or when one negative thought sends you into a spiral. **So this task helps you put what you've learnt into practice.**

#### Your Turn:

##### Part 1:

- 1) **Write or type out those three alternative viewpoints above.** You may want to keep them on paper, in a note book or on your phone. It doesn't matter where; just keep them handy so whenever your thoughts return to the old belief you have something to challenge them with.
- 2) **Use them regularly!** If you're not looking at your notes (or thinking about them) at least a couple of times a day then they won't work. If this feels like hard work then you're doing it right. It's hard to change anything when we start, so remember our brains learn through repetition and if you continue it *will* stick.

[Note – it's easier to challenge thoughts as they begin rather than when they're in full swing so this practice helps you become more aware of when the thoughts are happening]

## Part 2:

**As well as challenging the old beliefs with new ones it's important to create alternative experiences and fully appreciate the times you feel differently.**

Then you're working with both your confidence *and* your self-esteem. You may find these things are already happening in your life but get lost under the more difficult thoughts and feelings so start this practice of consciously enjoying yourself!

- 1) **Make a list of all the things you enjoy;** this could be big things like going on holiday or smaller things like reading a book, visiting a friend, running a bath or just remembering something that felt good.
- 2) **Start to plan into your day at least one thing you like doing** and give yourself permission to stick to it.
- 3) **Take time to reflect on these experiences afterwards** – how they felt, anyone else who might have been there and how they may have felt too. By consciously remembering these times (and the feelings that come with them) you actually increase their impact; like turning up the volume of a tune you like (and tuning out the music you don't want to listen to).

Keep these practises going as you move on to the last two steps.

## Step 4: TEST IT OUT

**When you're ready to take this step – make sure you do!**

You remember we spoke earlier about avoidance and procrastination? Well now's the time to lay them aside, face your fear and take action. **As soon as you're able to do this is the best time** as it builds on the momentum you've already created.



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Awareness, curiosity and self-care are important but won't stick without action. Our brains learn through new experiences and with your new approach to yourself it may be easier than the other times you've tried before. You're prepared and you're ready – so give this a go.

### Example:

I want to be better at maths and this is my plan:-

- 1) **Plan** - As I had a bad experience in class when I was younger, I feel more comfortable learning online. I've checked out a few courses and there's one that has email access to the tutor which I think I'm going to need!
- 2) **Schedule** – I need to free up some time to do this and because it's so important I'm going to make it my priority and work on it two nights a week for the 8 weeks of the course.
- 3) **Support** – I know it might be hard to keep on track when it gets difficult so I'm going to use the self-care I've learnt in step 3 and tell a couple of friends I'm doing it so they can help me out if I start to feel low about it.

### Example 2:

I'm in a new relationship now and I really want this to be different.

- 1) **Plan** – I'm going to look up all the info I can find on relationships and communication skills so I can learn how to handle conflict better and talk about how I'm feeling.
- 2) **Schedule** – This is important so rather than coming home every night and watching TV I'm going to spend an hour reading up on it.
- 3) **Support** – I know it'll be difficult putting into practice what I'm learning so I'm going to talk to my friend about it. She always seems to know what to say and gives her opinions in a way that doesn't lead to arguments. I'm not going to be so hard on myself and it might be a good idea to talk to my new partner about it – he seems understanding so far. And if I need extra help, I might call that counsellor I was thinking about a few months ago...

**Your Turn:**

**Choose one belief that's stopping you from doing something you really want to do** taking up a new hobby, applying for a new job or signing up for a course. Think of this as an '**experiment**' and when you've decided what it is you want to do, plan out the steps involved:-

1) PLAN:- \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2) SCHEDULE: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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3) SUPPORT: \_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



## Step 5: REVIEW

### Learn to celebrate your success and comfort your disappointment

So you've taken action – go you! And now you've got something to review. **I'm hoping you've had a good result but even if you didn't get what you were hoping for this next step is vital either way.**

Success can build confidence and trust in ourselves but sometimes our measure of success can be very narrow (especially if we'd have problems with our confidence and self-esteem) **so now's the time to redefine what success means to you.** Generally, we decide how successful we are based on how close we've come to our goal. But if this is your only measure of success you could be setting yourself up for problems in the future as you're ignoring all the hard work and effort you put in regardless of the outcome.

Todd Herman, a performance coach to athletes and entrepreneurs, talks about the importance of not measuring your success not by how close you've come to your goal but how far you've come. That's right – the fact that you've put yourself out there, worked on something difficult, and learnt important things along the way means you're streets ahead of where you started. And the good thing about this? It gives us motivation to continue. You may not have got the job you were hoping for but you've learnt something through the process and yes, another job will come along and this time you'll be even more prepared for it.

This approach can help to ease the disappointment that's natural to feel and help you pick yourself up for the next time.

#### Example 1 –

Arggh – that was horrible! I kept up with the maths classes but it was really tough and when I took the test at the end I failed by 3 marks!! I felt really bad, but because it was such a close thing (and my friend was encouraging me) I re-sat the test a few weeks later and this time I actually passed! I still don't like maths but now I know I can do it and it actually feels good to break through something I thought was impossible. And now I'm wondering what my next challenge might be (hopefully something more interesting than maths)...



Example 2 –

What a few weeks! I feel like I've learnt more about relationships in the last month than I have in the whole of my life. Okay – maybe I'm exaggerating a bit but that's because I'm starting to understand something that always baffled me and I've had a few experiences that have felt really good. My friend's been great and by opening up to her I've been able to 'practice' communicating differently. This gave me confidence and I was able to have a long chat with my partner about how things were before and I how I don't want to be again. He was really encouraging and I think it's brought us closer together. I know I still have some problems so I've made a counselling appointment for next week. I don't think I would have had the courage to do that before so I know things are changing.

**Your Turn:**

Last step! Congratulations for making it this far. Now review your progress – the good, the bad and the ugly – **using your definition of success as 'how far you've come' rather than 'how far you've still got to go':-**

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