



Social  
health &  
wellbeing



Support for life

# Improving your confidence and self-esteem

*A lack of self-esteem or confidence can have a knock-on effect across all areas of our lives, from relationships and work to mental health.*

*But, there's a difference between the two. Self-confidence is faith in your abilities, whereas self-esteem is faith in yourself. For example, you may have the ability to sing in front of a room full of people, but not believe that you're any good at it.*

Self-confidence and self-esteem aren't so much personality traits as skills that can be practiced and improved. However, it can be hard work and you'll need to be patient with yourself.

## Reprogram your thoughts

People with low self-esteem tend to be self-critical, find it hard to be kind to themselves and accept compliments from others. It may feel unnatural, but try and spend some time thinking positively about yourself.

- Take a piece of paper and draw a line down the middle
- On one side write down your good qualities and, on the other, your achievements. These could be something simple such as 'I make people smile' or 'I taught myself how to cook'
- Try to fill the page. This can feel hard, but remember that it's OK to recognise positive aspects about yourself.

Instead of focusing on your mistakes, try to draw positives from your experiences. Remind yourself that no-one is perfect and we can learn from things that go wrong. In fact most of our important lessons in life come from situations which don't go as we had hoped, every challenge gives us an opportunity to learn and grow.

## Be kind to yourself and treat yourself as you would treat others

Try not to put yourself down and instead learn to challenge your negative self-beliefs which can help your self-esteem. Identify any recurring negative thoughts – such as “I’m weird” or “I’m useless” – and find ways to challenge them. Think about whether you would talk to a loved one in the way you talk to yourself and then consciously try to adjust your internal voice.

You can use self-help resources like Mood Gym (available at [www.moodgym.anu.edu.au](http://www.moodgym.anu.edu.au)), which can help you think about how you view yourself. They can get you into the habit of thinking and saying positive things about yourself and to yourself.

## Impression of confidence

Sometimes putting on a display of confidence, even if you don't feel it, can change how others interact with you and give you a boost.

Try the following, which can give the impression of confidence:

- Walk tall – try to stand up straight and look ahead when you walk
- Speak slowly – people who are less confident tend to rush when they talk
- Wear brighter colours and clothes that make you feel good
- Don't cross your arms– this is a posture which displays defensiveness or nervousness. Instead, try to adopt a more open posture by keeping your arms at your sides or on your hips
- Make eye contact when you talk – you can practice this by meeting someone's eyes for three seconds, then looking away for one
- Avoid putting yourself down in conversations (but keep the ability to laugh at yourself!)

## Active steps

Set goals that are small and achievable as trying to take on too much can dent your confidence. Once you complete a goal, reflect and praise yourself and then set another and build up to something bigger.

If there's an activity or hobby that you know you're good at or makes you feel confident, make time to for it. Similarly, volunteering can help you feel better about yourself whilst helping others.

Take some small steps outside your comfort zone. This could be something as simple as taking a different route to work or making a suggestion in a meeting. The more you step out of your comfort zone, the broader it will become.

If you find you lack confidence in exams or taking on unfamiliar tasks, then preparation is key. This could be leaving enough time to revise, practicing a presentation in front of a mirror, chatting to someone knowledgeable or learning some relaxation techniques.

## Self-care

Looking after yourself is key for self-confidence - feeling hungry or tired can make you feel nervous. Try to get enough sleep, eat a balanced diet and exercise regularly. For more help with this, visit the Physical Health area of our website at [www.ben.org.uk/our-services/support-services/physical-health-wellbeing/](http://www.ben.org.uk/our-services/support-services/physical-health-wellbeing/)

## Surround yourself with positivity

Spend time with people who make you relax, laugh and feel good about yourself. If someone puts you down, limit the amount of time you're with them or if there's a place that makes you feel low, try to avoid spending time there. If a friend's jokes or 'banter' make you feel uncomfortable, you could let them know how this makes you feel.

If you feel lonely, you can read our advice on building a social life at [www.ben.org.uk/news-hub/ beating-loneliness/](http://www.ben.org.uk/news-hub/beating-loneliness/)



## Further sources of help

There is a lot of information out there to help you improve your confidence and self-esteem. Please have a look at these organisations for further information.

- Mind  
[www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)
- NHS Choices  
[www.nhs.uk/Livewell/mentalhealth/Pages/Dealingwithlowself-esteem.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/mentalhealth/Pages/Dealingwithlowself-esteem.aspx)
- Psychology Today  
[www.psychologytoday.com/blog/hidden-and-see/201205/building-confidence-and-self-esteem](http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/hidden-and-see/201205/building-confidence-and-self-esteem)
- Young Minds  
[www.youngminds.org.uk/find-help/looking-after-yourself/believe-in-yourself](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/find-help/looking-after-yourself/believe-in-yourself)

[www.ben.org.uk](http://www.ben.org.uk)

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**Free, confidential helpline:**  
**08081 311 333**

Ben - Motor and Allied Trades Benevolent Fund. Lynwood Court, Lynwood Village, Rise Road, Ascot SL5 0FG. A charity registered in England and Wales (no.297877) and Scotland (no.SC039842). Registered with the Homes and Communities Agency (no. LH3766).

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