

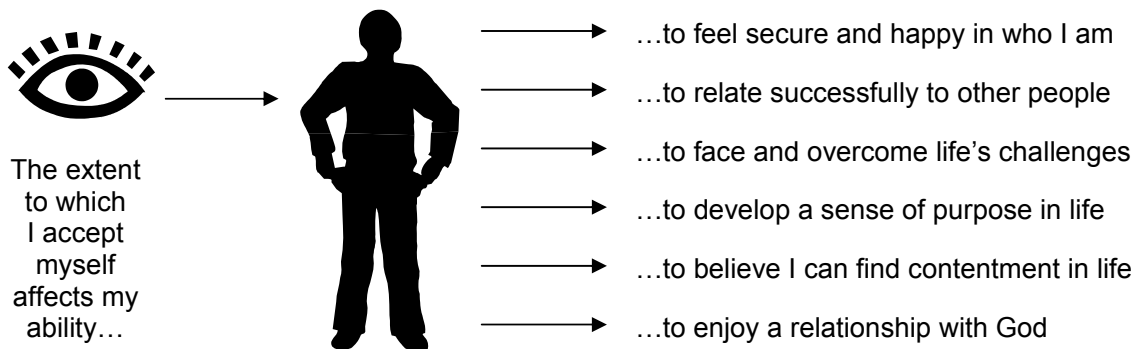
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SOCIAL ISSUES: SELF ACCEPTANCE

The most important social issue confronted by adolescents is that which relates to *themselves* – namely their self acceptance. Problems in the area of self acceptance affect other areas of the adolescent’s life, not just social areas but spiritual and emotional as well.

Significantly, this understanding and appreciation of self is not only critical for healthy adolescent growth, it is also an area of great vulnerability as they key task of adolescence is redefining self and creating one’s own sense of identity. Therefore we as youth leaders need to understand the dynamics of self acceptance, the factors that affect it, and strategies to enhance it through our contacts with youth, both informally and through our youth programmes.

When a child is born, he has neither a physical, nor an emotional self-image. He is simply a bundle of possibilities waiting for his innate potential and the influence of his environment to mold him into an independent person. And he is about to begin a journey that will shape his entire attitude toward himself. The way he makes this journey, and the help he gets along the way, will determine the essential make-up of his self-concept.
 - Dr Bruce Narramore¹



Understanding Self Acceptance

1. A Model for Self Acceptance

When it comes to understanding the dynamics of self acceptance we need to keep in mind the three “selves” that are present for all of us.

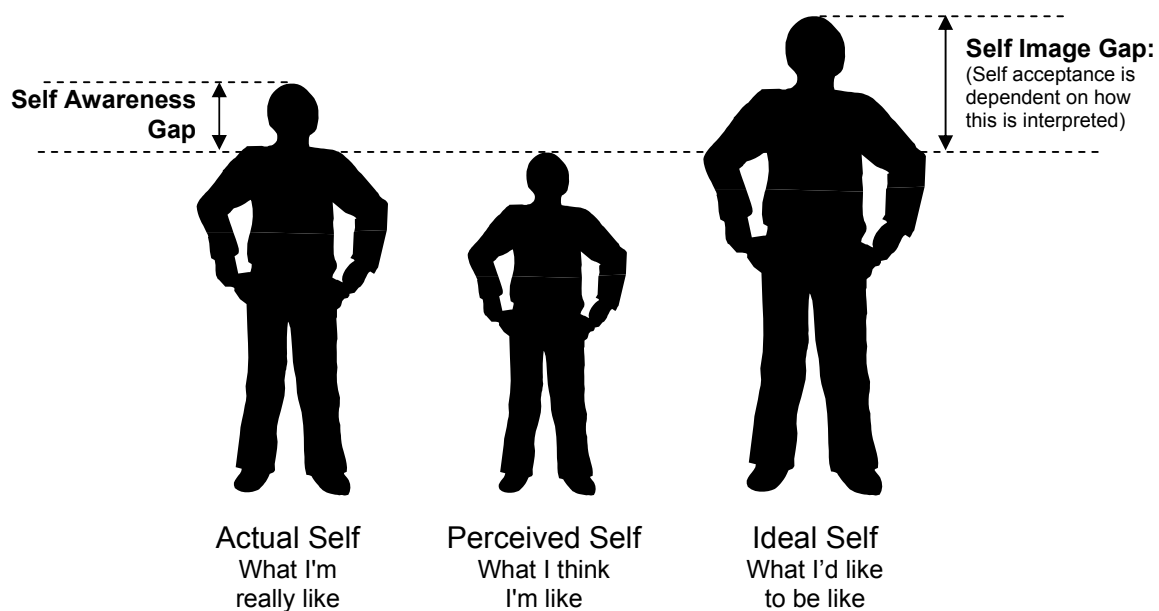
- i. **Actual self:** This is the person we really are – the person that God sees.
- ii. **Perceived self:** This is the person we believe ourselves to be – yet we only see ourselves in part.
- iii. **Ideal self:** This is the person we want to be or believe we should be.

These three “selves” are represented below and lead to two further definitions:

- i. **Self Awareness Gap:** The extent to which our perceived self matches our actual self.
- ii. **Self Image Gap:** The extent to which our perceived self matches our ideal self.

Self-esteem is our experience of being competent to deal with the challenges of life and of being deserving of happiness. [It] is a function of our deepest feelings about ourselves; it is not a matter of particular skills or particular knowledge. It is certainly not a matter of how well liked we are. It is a matter of the extent to which we experience ourselves as appropriate to life and to the requirements of life.

- Nathaniel Brandon²



Some further comments on dynamics:

a. Perceived Self vs. Actual Self

For the adolescent who is engaged in the process of identity development, the difference between the actual self and the perceived self can be great. Most commonly the perceived self is lesser than the actual self – that is, they feel unnecessarily negative about who they are, but in some cases the perceived self is over-inflated, even if only in some areas of perception. As we grow beyond adolescence into adulthood the gulf between the perceived self and the actual self reduces.

b. Perceived Self vs. Ideal Self

The ideal self is dictated by the expectations put upon a young person by society, those around them, and themselves. Again, adolescents are particularly prone to having a great difference between the two through establishing unreasonable ideals for themselves.

c. The three “selves” and self acceptance

Given the model of the three “selves” and the two “gaps”, where does self acceptance fit into the picture? The impact of the self awareness gap and the self image gap is not consistent from person to person. For example an adolescent may have a large gap between their perceived self and their ideal self, but are resigned to this gap and are able to accept it. Such a person has a higher self acceptance than an adolescent with a small self image gap who finds difficulty in accepting the difference between their perceived self and their actual self. The following pages will explore reasons that affect acceptance of the self image gap, but for now we can state that **self acceptance is dependent upon the interpretation a person places upon the discrepancy between their perceived self and their ideal self.**

d. Raising self acceptance

Understanding this model enables us to see two strategies for dealing with poor self acceptance through reducing the self image gap:

- i. Raise the level of the Perceived Self toward the level of the Actual Self. Help the person to gain an honest appreciation of who they are – to seem themselves as God sees them,
- ii. Reduce the level of the Ideal Self. Help the person to assess their ideals and establish more realistic expectations for themselves.

Pubescent young people and early to mid-adolescent teenagers bring more maturity to this theme of hero worshiping. The content changes from Superman or Wonderwoman to a current rock star, movie star or athlete. For some, the focus may be on a favorite teacher, pastor or even a scientist. As the teenager matures, the idealized object and the young person become more similar to each other. Idealized symbols that represent more attainable characteristics begin to be selected. The teenager also tries to become more like his or her idealized model. In addition to hero worship, the maturing adolescent begins to develop a collection of desirable traits to emulate. This more sophisticated self-ideal development requires a capacity for higher levels of abstractions. The self-ideal then becomes more personally identified rather than embodied in the image of another person. The young person concentrates on the question, “Who or what do I wish to be in life?”

- Dr Keith Olson³

2. The Elements of Self Acceptance

Self acceptance has essentially two elements to it:

a. Self respect.

The primary element is self respect which has to do with **worthiness**, or the adolescent's perception of **who they are** and their innate value.

An adolescent with a healthy sense of self respect will be:

- able to confidently assert their own wants and needs
- able to express their feelings openly without fear of criticism
- able to control their emotional responses to situations they face
- able to believe in their right to fulfilment and contentment
- able to accept what they look like and like who they are
- able to comfortably receive compliments
- able to comfortably give compliments
- able to receive love and affection
- able to give love and affection
- able to feel loved by God
- able to be relaxed and enjoy meeting new people
- able to trust others
- able to fit in with most groups of people and contribute
- able to process disappointment and failure
- able to laugh at themselves
- able to develop meaningful and significant relationships
- able to articulate a sense of purpose in life

b. Self efficacy

The secondary element is self efficacy which has to do with **competence**, or the adolescent's perception of what they can **do** with a sense of confidence and assurance.

An adolescent with a healthy sense of self efficacy will be:

- able to confidently tackle new tasks without a fear of failure
- able to accurately identify their strengths and weaknesses
- able to achieve some success in pursuits that interest them
- able to take care of their own needs
- able to positively tackle new challenges with some optimism
- able to celebrate other's successes even at their own expense
- able to contribute positively to the lives of other people
- able to identify strengths without the need to prove themselves

Note: By extrapolation those with poor self acceptance characteristically do not display the above abilities. Thus it is a good check list to use in assessing adolescent self acceptance.

Here's the secret formula: For anyone who feels that they suffer from low-self esteem, there are only two things that will make a difference, and they will both make all the difference in the world.

First, we have to become competent... Every human being has the potential to become competent for their age and intellectual strengths and limits... Self esteem is about stretching beyond one's perceived limitations.

The second key to cure low self esteem is to start hanging around with people who can accept you for who you are instead of for whom they think you should be. This does not mean, by the way, that people you start hanging around with have to praise you constantly and indiscriminately... Acceptance and belonging are different than that... A sense of belonging is one of the most important and powerful forces in any human being's life, yet it is conveyed in such a quiet, simple way in most cases... A sense of belonging is a pretty constant experience in a healthy family. It is conveyed in a lot of ordinary, matter-of-fact ways that, when combined, add up to the foundation for everything else in our lives.

- John & Linda Friel⁴



Assess the extent to which you yourself have a healthy sense of self acceptance by answering the following questions related to your self respect and self efficacy*.

Self Worth	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Usually	Always
<i>I am able to confidently assert my own wants and needs</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I am able to express my feelings openly without fear of criticism</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I am able to control my emotional responses to situations I face</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I am able to believe in my right to fulfillment and contentment</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I am able to accept what they look like and like who they are</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I am able to comfortably receive compliments from others</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I am able to comfortably give compliments to others</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I am able to comfortably receive love and affection from others</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I am able to comfortably give love and affection to others</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I am able to feel loved and accepted by God</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I am able to be relaxed and enjoy meeting new people</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I am able to comfortably trust others and let my guard down around them</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I am able to fit in with most groups of people and contribute constructively</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

* Adapted from John Powell *Why Am I Afraid to Love?* Thomas More Association (June 1, 1990)

	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Usually	Always
<i>I am able to process disappointment and failure</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I am able to laugh at myself - my idiosyncrasies and mistakes</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I am able to develop meaningful and significant relationships</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I am able to articulate a sense of purpose in my life</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Self Efficacy					
<i>I am able to confidently tackle new tasks without a fear of failure</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I am able to accurately identify my own strengths and weaknesses</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I am able to achieve some success in pursuits that interest me</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I am able to take care of my own basic needs</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I am able to positively tackle new challenges with some degree of optimism</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I am able to celebrate other's successes even at my own expense</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I am able to contribute positively to the lives of other people</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I am able to identify strengths without the need to try to prove myself</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Scoring					
Score yourself as follows and tally up your total:					
5 = Never 4 = Seldom 3 = Sometimes 2 = Usually 1 = Always					
If your score is over 60 or more it means the self acceptance issue is maybe something to work on.					

3. Self Acceptance and Adolescent Development

As was mentioned on the previous page adolescents are particularly vulnerable to self acceptance problems. The reasons are as follows:

a. Adolescent Development

i. Physical development

The rapid changes taking place in the adolescent's body create a sense of uncertainty. Coupled with society's superficial yet real pressure to be the right shape and have the right look and the adolescent is vulnerable to the problem of developing a poor perceived self in relation to their actual self, and to the other problem of establishing an unrealistic ideal.

ii. Emotional development

The adolescent is still developing the ability to deal constructively with the feelings that surface in relation to self acceptance issues (anger, disappointment, disillusionment, despair, shame etc.) Instead they risk these feelings being expressed through self loathing or depression.

iii. Cognitive development

They are still learning the skills of formal reasoning* and as such have difficulty bringing their perceived self into line with their actual self. They also tend to have an unrealistic ideal self to which their perceived self falls well short.

iv. Social development

A characteristic of adolescent social development is their tendency toward self absorption in which they construct an imaginary audience of those about them whom they convince themselves are noticing and dwelling on any slight defect or fault.

A second characteristic is the increase in the impact of peer assessment in relation to parental assessment. Generally speaking peers do not possess the same degree of insight and tact as parents making the adolescent vulnerable to hurtful criticism and condemnation.

The impact of a Eurocentric media portrayal of body images for non-European teenagers requires some investigation. Within New Zealand Maori, Pacific Island and Asian adolescent girls are offered no alternative media models than the Eurocentric one. The fashion and beauty industries are big business and the teenage girl's dollars are easily lured into buying products that offer a promise to help transform a less than perfect appearance in one more socially favoured. One New Zealand study showed that 72% of a surveyed group of twenty women between sixteen and forty wanted to weight less. Dissatisfaction with their body shape was expressed by 46% and 24% dieted constantly with 48 percent going on and off diets. (Gray, 1988:195). These statistics, if able to be generalised to the rest of the female population, would suggest that around half of this age group want to alter their **phenotype** in ways that they believe will made them more socially attractive. Within New Zealand's multi-cultural society where there is considerable genetic diversity, it is not appropriate for adolescent females to be confronted with Eurocentric standards of beauty.

- Sharon Daulton⁵

* See *Adolescence* YouthTRAIN, 2000

b. Adolescent Tasks

The adolescent has two important developmental tasks they must accomplish before they can enter fully into a healthy adulthood.

i. Identity

They must develop a new sense of who they are as they move from a childhood identity, which was very much integrated within parental and familial identity, and forge an identity which is more their own. This explains the setting aside of parental assessment (at least at a conscious level) and the need to create identity more from peer and self assessment. Hence the emerging identity is potentially fragile and vulnerable to negative feedback that can damage their sense of worth.

ii. Independence

A second task which leaves the adolescent's self acceptance vulnerable is that of independence. There is a moving away from the security of parental acceptance and affirmation and a having to make one's own decisions and take on new responsibilities. These experiences increase the likelihood of failure as the adolescent learns new skills and affects their ability to see themselves as competent.

c. Adolescent Needs

In accomplishing the above two tasks the adolescent has two essential needs that must be met.

i. Security

At a time where there are developing their own identity and are stepping out from under the security of family identity, adolescents have a need for security – an environment where they feel accepted for who they are and where they feel as though they belong. Such an environment not only offers security but enhances self worth. Yet for many adolescents too few such environments exist.

ii. Significance

Similarly, the adolescent has a need to feel significant. Through opportunities for involvement they need to develop a sense of adequacy and achievement that enhances self acceptance through the realisation that they are competent in at least some things. Yet adolescence is a difficult time in which to feel significant. Many teenagers are still developing the determination and self belief necessary to press on through failure and disappointment toward success and effectiveness.

Teenage years are particularly critical for cultivating positive self-esteem. With a new capacity to become self-conscious and introspective (i.e., from a formal operations stage of cognitive development), adolescents gather evidence to help them evaluate themselves: Am I intelligent? Am I competent? Am I attractive? They compare themselves with their own ideals and those of others, an experience that is often painful. The ideal self is built on aspirations that are either realistic, too low, or, for the adolescent struggling with inferiority, too high. Ideal selves that are realistic lead to self-acceptance. Those that are too low impede accomplishment. Those aspirations which are too high lead to frustration, self-depreciation, and inferiority. Self-esteem is the subjective evaluation of one's worth. It expresses approval or disapproval. It has been referred to as the single most significant key to behavior and the mainspring that launches every child for success or failure in living.

- Les Parrott III⁶

THE DYNAMICS OF SELF ACCEPTANCE

ELEMENTS	BASED ON	RELATED NEEDS & TASKS	REQUIREMENTS
<p>PRIMARY:</p> <p>Self Respect</p> <p>Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - self worth - self value - self esteem 	<p>Worthiness</p> <p><i>Based on:</i></p> <p><i>Who I AM</i></p>	<p>Primary Task: Identity</p> <p>Secondary task: Independence</p> <p>Primary Need: Security</p> <p>Secondary need: Significance</p>	<p>A sense of acceptance</p> <p>A sense of belonging</p>
<p>SECONDARY:</p> <p>Self Efficacy</p> <p>Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - self confidence - self assurance - self reliance 	<p>Competency</p> <p><i>Based on:</i></p> <p><i>What I can DO</i></p>	<p>Primary Task: Independence</p> <p>Secondary task: Identity</p> <p>Primary Need: Significance</p> <p>Secondary need: Security</p>	<p>A sense of adequacy</p> <p>A sense of achievement</p>

4. Areas of Poor Self Acceptance

For the adolescent, the self acceptance battle can be all consuming and is fought on a number of fronts. It is these fronts that significantly shape the adolescent's view of their emerging self. The battle commonly occurs through comparison as they assess themselves in relation to peers and the images they see portrayed in the media.

a. The Physical Front: "I'm ugly!"

On this front the teen judges themselves on physical attributes, many of which are undergoing change, leading to doubts and questions:

- Height: Rapid increase through a growth spurt – "Am I too short/too tall?"
- Weight: Rapid increase through a growth spurt – "Am I too fat or too thin?"
- Body shape: Curves and muscles developing – "Am I starting to look like a woman/man?"
- Complexion: Acne through secretion of oil during puberty – "How can I hide skin blemishes?"
- Hair: New more "adult" styles – finance and freedom to experiment – "How can I get my hair to do what I want?"
- Facial features: Gradually developing – "Is my nose/chin/ears etc. becoming too big/small etc.?"

b. The Performance Front: "I'm useless!"

Here the adolescent makes assessments on themselves based on what they can or cannot do. They will try things and if they do not experience quick success they will place a "label" on themselves that predisposes them to ongoing failure or takes away the motivation to keep trying in order to improve. The main areas of performance are:

- Academic – usually a negative judgement on self based on poor performance but also pressure to not excel.
- Sporting – a need to be good at at least one sport.
- Pastimes/interests – skill based activities e.g. arts.

c. The Position Front: "I'm uncool!"

On this third front the adolescent makes assessment regarding where they fit in the social pecking order. This assessment is based on:

- Social capability – e.g. conversational skills, ease of making friends, sense of humour.
- Status symbols – e.g. clothes, car, phone, home.
- Behaviour – do they do things considered "cool", even if these actions are considered immoral or illegal e.g. drugs, promiscuous behaviour, stealing, cheating.

If you asked ten teenagers what they were most unhappy about, eight of them would be dissatisfied with some feature of their bodies. They feel ugly and unattractive, and they think about that problem most of the time. They also think that the opposite sex doesn't like them. The girls feel too tall and the boys feel too short, or they feel too fat or too thin or they're worried about the pimples on their faces or the freckles on their noses or the colour of their hair, or they think their feet are too big or they don't like their fingernails. No matter how minor the problem is, it can create great anxieties and depression.

A second characteristic that young people don't like about themselves is that they feel unintelligent or stupid. This feeling often begins during the very early school years, when they have trouble learning in school. Either they have a hard time learning to read, and they start worrying about this problem, or else they blurt out answers that make everyone laugh. They gradually start to believe that everybody in the classroom (including the teacher) thinks they're stupid, and this brings the same old feeling of inferiority.

- Dr James Dobson⁷

5. Triggers of Poor Self Acceptance

We have already seen that poor self acceptance comes from an overly low self perception and overly high self ideal. But what triggers these?

a. Family

The most common trigger of poor self acceptance relates to the family. Young people growing up in families that do not express unconditional acceptance, do not create a close sense of belonging, and do not help them discover things they can do well, are much more likely to struggle with their own sense of low self worth and low self confidence. Put simply, without the safety net of positive self acceptance in childhood it is difficult for the adolescent to launch out into adulthood and develop a positive self acceptance all of their own.

b. Peers

The lower the sense of self acceptance the family has imparted to the adolescent, the more vulnerable they are to those factors that would further harm self acceptance. Teenagers face great pressure to conform in order to be accepted. Refusal to do so can lead to ridicule and ostracism, which can harm self acceptance, while conformity at the expense of one's own values and morals can also lead to a sense of guilt, shame and diminished self worth.

c. Society

The media has a significant role to play in the development of unrealistically high self ideals. Magazines and movies present girls as being slim, well proportioned and with blemish free complexions. Young men are seen as good looking, tall and strong. Traits such as confidence, a quick sense of humour, and popularity with the opposite sex are elevated above more lasting and less superficial qualities.

d. Events and circumstances

Events such as abuse, divorce or other traumatic events where a young person has been severely embarrassed or shamed – perhaps over a period of time, can trigger a loss of self respect or a sense of inadequacy to develop in the adolescent.

e. Temperament

It is evident that temperament plays some role in a person's self acceptance. Adolescents with a more sensitive nature are more vulnerable to the effect of the above factors, while those with strong individualistic tendencies are more immune.

I meet parents all the time who live out their dreams through their children. It is such a sad sight! These parents push and push and push their kids until they break. Some children, instead of breaking, turn to drugs or alcohol or become violent. Demand the best, not perfection.

- Jerry Johnston⁸

Self-concept is like a three-legged table. If all three aspects of self-concept are not in place, it is wobbly. These three legs are like three voices. Teens with a strong self-concept have three voices in their ear. The first voice says, "I'm loved by the magic people in my life"—the significant other people. We're all magic people in the lives of teens. The second voice says, "I have just as many skills as I need for a person my age. I can compete in the classroom. I can compete at home. I can compete out on the street. I can compete in sports. I can compete anywhere with people my age. I'm okay."

The third voice says, "I can take control of my life. I can take responsibility and make decisions for myself, and (here's the important part) I can live with the consequences of my decisions or actions."

- Foster Cline
and Jim Fay⁹

Pastoral Care and Self Acceptance

1. A Biblical Perspective of Self Acceptance

There has been much debate in Christian circles on the whole “self esteem” matter. Some have labelled preoccupation with it as error, pointing out that the Bible teaches self denial and self sacrifice rather than self esteem. For this reason the term used preferred throughout this section is “self acceptance”. All of us can agree that God wants us to accept who He has made us to be and not long to be or try to be someone we are not. There is no doubt that low self acceptance is common amongst the young people and that that Bible has much to say about their value that can help them develop a clear understanding of God’s view of their “actual self”.

a. We are created in God’s image

²⁶ *Then God said, “Let us make people in our image, to be like ourselves.*
- Genesis 1:26

There is something intrinsically “God-like” in who we are which makes us of great intrinsic value – a value based in who we are not in what we have done.

b. We are loved and accepted unconditionally by God

⁸ *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*
- Romans 5:8

No matter what we have done wrong in the past, or what we do wrong in the future – God loves us, and His love is more than a warm feeling. It’s a love demonstrated through an ultimate act of sacrifice.

c. Who we are and not how we look is important to God

⁷ *But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have refused him. For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”*
- 1 Samuel 16:7

If God admires inner qualities more than outward appearance then we too should focus on these, seeing the good in ourselves and asking him to change those areas which are not so pleasing.

Until someone loves every part of you, accepts you totally, just the way you are, you cannot love yourself and you cannot ever know love.

Until the day you know who someone else really is and totally accept them, just the way they are, you will never know what loving is.

- Jean Bond¹⁰

Compared with... secular perspectives, the Christian view of self esteem is in a category by itself. It alone elevates man above the animals. It alone provides a solid foundation on which to build self-esteem. The biblical view of man acknowledges our sins and failures, but doesn’t demean our deepest significance as creations of the living God...

Because we are created in the image of God, we possess great worth, significance and value. We are loved by God and deserving of the love of ourselves and others.

- Bruce Narramore¹¹

d. Self love is not wrong

You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.' And, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' "

- Luke 10:27

⁴ Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud ⁵ or rude. Love does not demand its own way.

- 1 Corinthians 13:4,5

Contained within His commandment that we love others is the assumption that we love self. Jesus did not condemn the fact of loving self. But true self love is not arrogance, pride or boastfulness. It is patient and kind toward oneself.

e. Self acceptance comes through honest assessment

³ Be honest in your estimate of yourselves, measuring your value by how much faith God has given you. ⁴ Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, ⁵ so it is with Christ's body. We are all parts of his one body, and each of us has different work to do. And since we are all one body in Christ, we belong to each other, and each of us needs all the others.

- Romans 12:3-5

We do not raise a young person's self acceptance by hype, flattery or manipulation. Instead we help them to gain a truer picture of their actual self and then provide opportunity to serve and grow in competence and self efficacy.

f. Self acceptance is found through submission to a cause greater than oneself

²⁵ If you try to keep your life for yourself, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for me, you will find true life.

- Matthew 16:25

Contrary to the self-help gurus who say self acceptance is found within through positive thinking, Jesus taught that in order to "find self we must lose self". In other words, a secret to self acceptance is acknowledgment of our need of Christ, submission to Him and investing our lives in others for His sake. We see this principle frequently throughout the gospels:

- Luke 5:1-11 – Peter falls on his knees before Jesus acknowledging his own sinfulness after the great catch of fish. Jesus does not deny Peter's sinfulness but instead calls him as a follower – a fisher of men.
- Luke 19:1-10 – Zaccheus, having been noticed and then visited by Jesus, confesses his sin and pledges restitution.
- John 8:3-11 – The woman caught in adultery is not accused or condemned by Jesus. Instead she is commanded to "go and sin no more".

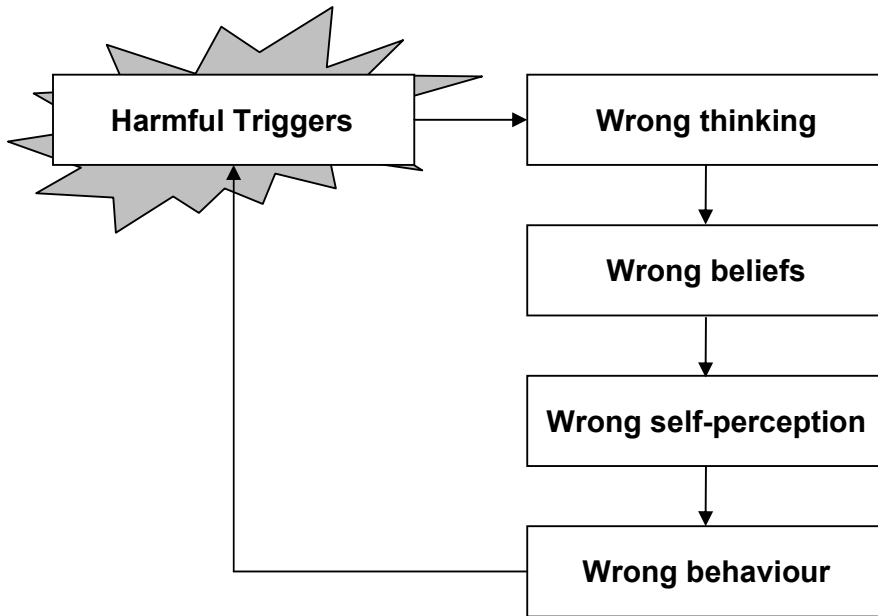
Very frequently in Jesus' ministry, it is those unacceptable in society and, by their very activities unacceptable to themselves, who come to Him and find new life and identity as they accept Him as Saviour...

He gives them a new vision of themselves, their own sin, and their own worth when sin is drawn away. He shows them who they are and He loves them, in spite of the fact that they are unlovely. The transformation is miraculous. The same is possible for those who come to us for counselling.

- Duncan Buchanan¹²

2. A Process for Pastoral Care

In order to provide pastoral care for adolescents facing poor self acceptance we need to understand the self acceptance cycle and why it is so difficult to break out of. As we have already seen, self acceptance difficulties are caused by a young person’s response to certain triggers (see page 13). This “response” is wrong ways of thinking about themselves which then combine with wrong beliefs about what others (including God perhaps) must be thinking about them. These two in turn create a wrongly self perception which is like a movie that plays over and over in the young person’s mind, leading them to behave in wrong ways. This wrong behaviour attracts negative feedback and harmful consequences, which then become more harmful triggers, and so the cycle continues.



Note that the triggers do not cause poor self acceptance. It is the young person’s response to the triggers that is at the root of the problem. In order to provide helpful pastoral care we must accept we cannot always remove the harmful triggers, and even if we could it could not solve the problem. We must instead focus on the four areas on the right above and deal with each of these. The most significant is “wrong thinking”, but we do not simply focus on this and hope the rest will follow. The following pages give advice, ideas and suggestions for each area.

High self-esteem is about liking yourself and feeling good about yourself. It is a prerequisite for trusting and acting on your intuition, for continuing to develop your creativity, and for valuing others and their ideas along with your own. When your self-esteem is high you don't have to win at all costs; you can be flexible when you need to be. You are your own person. You can behave spontaneously and you don't have to constantly measure yourself against other people's standards. You take responsibility for fulfilling your own needs. You accept your feelings and can recognise when you are happy and angry and fearful and sad, and you feel safe enough to express your feelings appropriately. Your life is likely to be full and rich with satisfying, happy relationships. You are effective and productive.

Low self-esteem means that you have your eye on someone else to assess how you are going according to their values. You have to prove yourself all the time, prove that you are right, and therefore that others are wrong; or you are unaware that you have something of value to offer the world, you don't believe in yourself and you lack the confidence to really enjoy life.

- Susan Barton and Katherine Ingram¹³

2. Understand Wrong Thinking

The first step in pastoral care is to understand the thought processes that are occurring within the young person. If they are to overcome wrong patterns of thinking they must first understand these patterns and where they come from. Only when wrong thinking has been identified can we work with the young person to overcome “lies” they have come to believe. The information we should be seeking can be summarised as follows:

a. Self perception: How they view themselves

Not until we can understand how the young person views themselves can we provide the direction and care they will need to change. Questions worth asking are:

- What words would you use to describe yourself?
- What are your main qualities as a person?
- What are you good at?
- If you could change just one thing about yourself what would it be?
- Do you ever call yourself names or put “labels” on yourself? If so what are they?
- Do you find that people generally like you? Why or why not?
- Do you like yourself? Why or why not?
- Do you think you make a good friend? Why or why not?

b. Others perceptions: How they believe significant others in their lives view them

The adolescent’s beliefs about others perceptions can be revealing, particularly when compared to reality. There may be value in having those perceived to be negative about them to actually declare their true opinions. Questions worth asking are:

- What words would your parents use to describe you?
- What words would other significant people use – family members, teachers, sports coaches etc.?
- How sure are you that these people really see you this way? How much is assumption and how much is verifiable fact?

-
- If no one said, “I love you,” we would doubt our lovable-ness!
 - If no one said, “I am glad you were born into our family,” we would doubt our belonging!
 - If no one said, “I can see that you have done a good job,” we would doubt our capability!
 - If no one said, “I need you,” we would doubt our value!
 - If no one said, “It is okay to feel,” we would doubt our humanness!
 - If no one said, “I forgive you,” we would doubt our okay-ness!
 - If no one said, “Hello,” we would doubt our existence!
 - If no one said, “It is okay to think,” we would doubt our independence!
 - If no one said, “God loves you,” we would doubt our eternal significance!
- David Carlson¹⁴*
-

c. Triggers: How the past has affected them

Past events and circumstances – even relatively “minor” occurrences can have a significant impact on the young person who is struggling with self acceptance at the time. Questions worth asking are:

- What memories from childhood are most painful for you?
- If you could change anything about your life right now what would it be?
- How much discipline and control have your parents exerted over you in growing up? How has this affected you?
- How much affection and encouragement have your parents exerted over you in growing up? How has this affected you?
- What “should” messages have you been given by your parents both now and in growing up?

d. Processes: How the young person views their life

Enquiring into the adolescent’s perception of life will be invaluable in moving beyond their observation and perceptions down to the level of how they act and react because of these. Questions worth asking are:

- What do you find yourself thinking when you are faced with having to do something you’ve not tried before?
- What thoughts go through your mind when you fail at something?
- What thoughts go through your mind when criticised?
- How difficult is it for you to express a personal opinion? In what situations is it hardest? When is it easiest?
- How difficult is it for you to express your inner feelings? In what situations is it hardest? When is it easiest?
- In what situations do you feel most positive about yourself?
- In what situations do you feel least positive?

e. Beliefs: How the young person views “self”

An adolescent’s fragile self acceptance can be further damaged by a lack of understanding regarding what self acceptance really is. These are questions that can be discussed together in order to clarify what their perceptions really are and how they affect them:

- What do you see as being the difference between pride and feeling good about yourself?
- What do you see as being the difference between putting yourself down and being humble?
- What do you see as being the difference between worthlessness and unworthy?
- What do you see as being the difference between self centredness and self love?
- What do you see as being the difference between aggression and assertiveness?

Identifying and learning how to take responsibility for your actions is the critical first step in seeing yourself more clearly. It’s also a step toward building real and lasting self-esteem, because you can love yourself only when you really know who you are. Self-examination can be difficult, because you’re looking past your filters to the truth, and it is our filters that protect us, that shield us from real and perceived dangers. But filters, by their very nature, cloud your thinking and distort your vision, preventing you from seeing things as they really are. For example, a photograph taken with a filtered lens can make the subject more appealing. There are fewer blemishes and wrinkles. Think of the old saying “seeing things through rose-colored glasses.” The idea is when you wear these glasses, the world becomes rosy. Through filters, we see only the good in us. And as our filters make us more perfect and less human, they make other people more flawed.

- Francine Ward¹⁵

3. Correct Wrong Beliefs

In order to help young people move toward a place of self acceptance based on right thinking we must first talk with them about the importance of having right beliefs and help them to adopt these. There will be two main areas of

a. Self acceptance is begins with accepting God's assessment

For a young person who acknowledges faith in God, this point provides the best starting point. It begins by having the young person accept that God made them and accepts them as they are regardless of how they look, feel, think or act. Remind them of these six truths:

- They are created by God: (Genesis 1:27,31; Colossians 1:16)
- They are known by God: (Matthew 10:30; Psalms 139:13-16)
- They are loved by God: (John 3:16; Romans 8:31-35)
- They are chosen by God: (Ephesians 1:4,5; Romans 8:29,30)
- They are called by God: (Galatians 1:15; 2 Timothy 1:9)
- They are valuable to God (Luke 15:4-7, Colossians 1:13,14)

If they are a Christian further remind them of six more truths:

- They are a child of God: (Romans 8:15-17; Galatians 4:7)
- They are forgiven by God: (Colossians 2:13,14; 1 John 1:9)
- They are God's possession: (John 10:27-29; 1 Peter 2:9b,10)
- They are secure in God (Hebrews 13:5,6; Romans 8:38,39)
- They are a new creation: (2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:10)
- They are capable (1 Corinthians 12:14-27; Philippians 4:13)

Encourage them to spend time alone with God, studying these verses initially and developing their relationship with Him. As they grow closer to Him they will increasingly find faith to truly believe these truths about themselves.

b. Self acceptance comes not from what others think of us but from what we know of ourselves

Help them to see that the way to self acceptance is not to *do* more or *be* something more to get people to like them more. Self acceptance begins with ourselves. It is a choice to not accept the wrong impressions and opinions of others and a decision to make our own self judgements based on our own opinions and the facts. It also involves a realisation that where there are things about who we are we are not happy about, we can make a choice to change these.

Self-esteem is an intimate experience; it resides in the core of one's being. It is what I think and feel about myself, not what someone else thinks or feels about me. This simple fact can hardly be overemphasized. I can be loved by my family, my mate, and my friends, and yet not love myself. I can be admired by my associates and yet regard myself as worthless. I can project an image of assurance and poise that fools almost everyone and yet secretly tremble with a sense of my inadequacy. I can fulfill the expectations of others and yet fail my own; I can win every honor and yet feel I have accomplished nothing; I can be adored by millions and yet wake up each morning with a sickening sense of fraudulence and emptiness. To attain "success" without attaining positive self-esteem is to be condemned to feeling like an impostor anxiously awaiting exposure. The acclaim of others does not create our self-esteem. Neither does erudition, material possessions, marriage, parenthood, philanthropic endeavors, sexual conquests, or face-lifts. These things can sometimes make us feel better about ourselves temporarily or more comfortable in particular situations. But comfort is not self-esteem.
- Nathaniel Branden¹⁶

4. Correct Wrong Self Perception

As a young person begins to develop new ways of thinking and new beliefs, their perception of themselves will begin to change. Some suggestions we can offer to help them speed this process are:

a. Compare the perceived self with the ideal self

Compile two lists: one of how they see themselves and another of how they wish they could be or think they *should* be. Compare these lists, exposing unrealistic and unhelpful expectations and work to come up with a more realistic ideal.

b. Compare the perceived self with the actual self

A young person caught in a poor self acceptance cycle will find themselves silently and repeatedly giving themselves negative “talk” that short circuit any efforts to change. This talk consists of words and images. What they need to do is:

- Identify the negative statements they make to themselves along with the negative images they hold (e.g. “I’m no good” along with images of themselves failing”)
- Assess the veracity and validity of these statements and come up with positive *but true* statements and images to replace them with (i.e. bring the perceived self into line with the actual self). Avoid unrealistic positive thinking. For example, instead of thinking “I can do this” they are better to tell themselves “I can try to do this (competency) and if I can’t its OK, cause it doesn’t have to affect my sense of self worth.”
- Have them repeat these statements when tempted to use the negative.

c. Spend time with people who feed the positive

Find out who the young person knows who makes them feel good about themselves. Maybe they need to assess friendships and deliberately spend time with people who are “good” for them. They may need help and encouragement to develop new friendship with peers.

Find out who the adults are whom they admire and who give them positive affirmation. Resolve to be one of these people in the young person’s life and look for specific ways in which to give encouraging feedback.

-
- Do not label yourself negatively (“I’m such a klutz!” etc.). You tend to become the label you give yourself.
 - When you fail, admit or confess it to God/ and then refuse to condemn yourself. “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”
 - Be as kind to yourself as you would to any other person.
 - Do not compare yourself with others. You are a unique person. God enjoys you in your uniqueness; have a similar attitude toward yourself.
 - Concentrate and meditate on God’s grace, love, and acceptance—not on criticisms from other people.
 - Associate with friends who are positive, who delight in you, and who enjoy life.
 - Learn to laugh; look for the humor in life and experience it.
 - Do what is right and pleasing in the eyes of God. When our lives reflect God’s character/ we are a lot happier; obedience to God makes us feel good about ourselves.
 - Be positive (see Phil. 4:8). See how long you can go without saying something negative about another person or situation.

- Josh McDowell &
Bob Hostetter¹⁷

5. Correct Wrong Behaviours

A young person struggling with a poor sense of self acceptance will commonly behave unacceptably. They will see themselves as unlovable and so will act that way, leading to criticism and ostracism that further confirm their sense of low self worth. They will also give up on making an effort to better themselves, believing that change is either impossible or futile. Improved self worth will lead to improved self efficacy but the reverse is also true: an improvement in competence and behaviour will lead to a greater sense of self worth. Thus we work on the following:

a. Act right in order to feel right

Discuss with the young person various situations they face in which a lack of self acceptance causes them to act in ways that are destructive, both to themselves and to others. Identify ways they might act differently that will leave them feeling better about themselves and free from more harmful triggers in the way others respond back to them. For example, if they are struggling with pornography that is harming their sense of self worth, rather than work on self worth alone, they should come up with ways that will stop them looking at pornography and descending into a harmful cycle.

b. Change what can be changed

Help them change those things that can be changed. For example maybe they need help with study in order to improve grades. Or perhaps they would benefit from a “makeover” or “new look” to help improve self image. If they are struggling with obesity help them to establish a routine of exercise and a healthy diet.

c. Develop competence

Devote time to developing skills that would see them grow in competence in areas that are important to them. Help them to set performance goals and offer encouragement to achieve them and affirmation when they succeed.

We believe that *doing good leads to feeling good*. Right behavior leads to right feeling, and the accumulation of right feelings leads to a healthy view of self. When you do the right thing, you feel approved, appreciated, virtuous—even when no one is looking. That's because your conscience, the silent witness of your soul, speaks to you either by affirming or accusing you regarding your actions. This is the basis for the statement, “Do something good; feel something real.” When you do a good deed or perform your civic duty or return to pay for that item you accidentally walked out of the store with, don't you feel good about yourself? Doing right leads to feeling right.

- Gary Ezzo and
Robert Buckman¹⁸

6. Nurturing Self Acceptance in Youth Ministry

Youth ministries have important role to play in helping adolescents develop a healthy self acceptance by providing them with the requirements needed (see chart page 11). We must provide:

a. A sense of acceptance

By sensing that they are accepted by others, both adults and peers, young people will find it easier to accept themselves. We communicate acceptance by:

- Treating the young people equally and not showing favouritism.
- Refusing to allow put downs. If you hear any deal with them openly and firmly and explain that in order to provide a “safe” environment for everyone put downs will not be tolerated.
- Labelling negative behaviour unacceptable/naughty/wrong but never the person. That way they get the message that you will always accept and love them even when they make mistakes.

b. A sense of belonging

As we have seen, a sense of belonging is critical in order for young people to develop a sense of their own self worth. In order to help young people feel as though they belong:

- Value each person’s contribution. No matter how small it might be, let them know that their contribution is important to the whole group.
- Follow up young people when they are absent. If they miss a week or two and no one contacts them they can assume they are not important to anyone in the group and so don’t belong.

c. A sense of adequacy

In order to instil a sense of inadequacy:

- Engage in “safe” activities – not ones with the potential to embarrass young people
- Provide opportunities to develop and display competence using their skills and abilities

d. A sense of achievement


A sense of achievement is developed when we:

- Offer appreciation and affirmation for things well done
- Celebrate accomplishments with them and draw attention to their achievements

There are two primary ways to help foster self esteem. First help the youth develop an area where she is special, unusual, and better than others. Some parents have done this by giving kids music lessons, some by putting children into drama classes, some by focusing on developing children's athletic abilities. You must be very sensitive to the special talents and gifts of the child and then capitalize on them so the child develops them to the utmost. Thus the child feels special, and that feeling enables her to have a sense of worth.

Second, the church youth group at its best can give a child a sense of belonging and acceptance. Very often the child who is not accepted in the larger context of the public school can find affirmation and worth in this small body of believers. Parents need to be willing to change churches as the child comes into those junior-high years, if necessary, to find a church with a youth group (or begin such a group) that will minister to the child's need for affirmation.

- Tony Campolo¹⁹

 Reflect on the extent to which your youth ministry helps young people develop a healthy sense of self acceptance by placing an "X" on each of the lines below:

	NO	_____	YES
<i>"We treat all young people the same and don't show favouritism."</i>			
	NO	_____	YES
<i>"We refuse to allow put downs and deal with them openly and firmly in order to create a "safe" environment."</i>			
	NO	_____	YES
<i>"We label unacceptable behaviour as unacceptable but never the person themselves."</i>			
	NO	_____	YES
<i>"We value each person's contribution no matter how small."</i>			
	NO	_____	YES
<i>"We follow up young people when they are absent for a week or two."</i>			
	NO	_____	YES
<i>"We engage in safe activities that do not have the potential to embarrass young people."</i>			
	NO	_____	YES
<i>"We opportunities for young people to develop and display competence using their skills and abilities."</i>			
	NO	_____	YES
<i>"We offer specific appreciate and affirmation for things well done."</i>			
	NO	_____	YES
<i>"We celebrate accomplishments with them and draw attention to their achievements."</i>			

Which two of these areas do you most need to work on? What specifically will you do?

- 1.
- 2.

Perfectionism

One extreme aspect of self acceptance worthy of individual comment is the trait of unhealthy perfectionism in which the young person is driven to achieve but is never able to do so to their satisfaction. It is a complex problem which at its extreme will require professional help. Yet it is good for us to understand its dynamics so that we are able to identify it and assess the degree of seriousness, whilst ensuring we don't inadvertently contribute to the problem. Its triggers are the same as those on page 13, with temperament and interaction with parents who may display the same perfectionist characteristics having a particularly significant role. It is thought that giftedness may also predispose a young person to unhealthy perfectionism and that it may lead to depression if not treated properly.

1. Characteristics of Unhealthy Perfectionists

a. All-or-nothing mindset

The perfectionist sets high goals such as, "I must come first" or "I must get an A" which are great motivators. However their problem is that when they don't achieve these goals they are unable to respond in a realistic manner and they become inconsolable.

b. Telescopic thinking

Like using opposite ends of a telescope, the perfectionist views failures much larger than they really are, and successes as much smaller than they really are.

c. Eternal Dissatisfaction

The perfectionist is unable to find any satisfaction with their efforts. Always there is the thought in the back of their mind that "I could/should have done better". Consequently they will attempt a task over and over and still not find any satisfaction from their efforts.

d. Continual Procrastination

Fear of failure will cause the perfectionist to put off starting a project or finishing it. They reason that whatever they accomplish will not be good enough and the feelings of shame will be too great to handle.

The most common mental distortion found among perfectionists is all-or-nothing thinking. They evaluate their experiences in a dichotomous manner, seeing things as either all-black or all-white. That outlook is epitomized by the straight-A student who receives a B on an examination and concludes, "Now I am a total failure." Dichotomous thinking causes the perfectionist to fear mistakes and to overreact to them. A second (distortion).. derives from overgeneralization. When perfectionists make mistakes, they tell themselves, "I'm always goofing up. I'll never get this right." Because of such over-generalized thinking, perfectionists perceive themselves as having a very narrow margin of safety. A third distortion system that plagues perfectionists involves "should" statements. When perfectionists fall short of a goal they aren't likely to ask themselves "How can I learn from this?" with a compassionate attitude of self-acceptance. Instead they harangue themselves, saying, "I shouldn't have goofed up! I ought to do better!" Such statements create feelings of frustration and guilt that, cause them to get stuck on the error.

- David Burns²⁰



Assess the extent to which you yourself have a tendency toward perfectionism by honestly responding to the following statements*.

	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Usually	Always
<i>I tend to take on too much but resist asking other to help because it feels like admitting defeat.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I find it hard to make choices and to finish things I start even though I feel bad about it.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I am competitive, constantly comparing myself with others and always needing to be the best.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I tend to get carried away with details and end up rushing at the last minute and being late.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I find myself thinking critical thoughts of other people in an effort to feel better about myself.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I tend to take too much notice of negative comments and not enough of positive ones.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I tend to not try to do something unless I feel, I have a chance of excelling at it.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I am scared of making mistakes because of what people might say or think about me</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I tend to put myself down by using labels such as "stupid", "dumb" or "useless"</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I have a hard time believing that God loves and accepts me and I find it hard to forgive myself</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Scoring

Score yourself as follows and tally up your total:

1 = Never 2 = Seldom 3 = Sometimes 4 = Usually 5 = Always

If your score is between 40 and 50 you show dangerous perfectionist tendencies. 30 to 39 means you show some tendencies and you need to maintain self awareness and avoid unhealthy thought processes. 20-29 is healthy. 10-19 means perhaps you are a little too relaxed about achieving!

* Adapted from Thomas Greenspoon, *Freeing Our Families From Perfectionism*, Minneapolis, Minnesota: Free Spirit Publishing, 2002

2. Strategies for Helping Perfectionists

The following are offered as suggestions for helping fledgling perfectionists in our youth groups.

a. Educate and explain

Identify perfectionist tendencies and help the young person identify the lies on which these are built. Help them to see the difference between excellence and perfection, between doing one's best and accepting one's limitations.

b. Affirm the process as well as the product

Help them to find enjoyment in trying to achieve as well as in the achievement itself by offering plenty of encouragement along the way. That way they will learn satisfaction in undertaking an activity and not rely solely on its outcome for all their satisfaction.

c. Be a role model

Demonstrate an ability to laugh at your own failures and imperfections, and be quick to apologise when you have made a mistake.

d. Avoid unhelpful messages

Statements like "Just do your best" only serve to give them permission to set even higher standards, while telling them to "lighten up" or "take it easy" doesn't work. Avoid comparisons with peers or siblings.

e. Be positive

Focus on the adolescent's strengths and successes and avoid any criticism as they will tend to over-exaggerate your intent.

f. Help them to experience and process failure

Create safe ways for them to participate in activities that are not their strength. Don't rescue them from failure but help them to see that its impact is not as disastrous as they are apt to believe. Offer reassurance and acceptance.

Our value, from God's viewpoint, is not based on being perfect or on achieving some difficult feat. Our value is a birthday gift which comes with our existence because God created us. How we look, how we act, how we think, what we say and what we do—these are important to God *after* we have accepted his love and forgiveness. Before our conversion, they have no influence on God's grace. After our conversion, however, our behavior does matter to God. He asks for loving obedience to his will, not perfection. Many confuse obedience with perfection; and this confusion leads to shame, failure, and a lowered self-esteem. Having responded to appeals to rededicate their lives to Christ, but having failed repeatedly to live righteously, people often give up trying to please God because they realize they cannot be consistent.

- David Carlson²¹

For Further Thought...

Reflect on your own sense of self acceptance. Use the questions on pages 17 and 18 to identify causes of any self acceptance struggles you have had (and may still have) in life.



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