



**Self-Esteem:
Healing
Self-Judgment and
Shame**

The Secret of Self-Esteem

By Dr. Margaret Paul

Have you ever thought about what really creates self-esteem? Having a deep sense of inner worth is important to all of us, but many people have some false beliefs about what creates confidence in our own merit as individuals.

Some of the common false beliefs regarding what creates self-esteem are:

- I will feel good about my self when I'm making \$_____ (fill in the amount) a year.
- I will feel worthy when I am in a relationship with a (beautiful) (handsome) (wealthy) (loving) (fill in your own) person.
- I will feel worthy when I get enough approval from enough people, or when I'm famous.
- I will feel adequate when I have a baby.
- I will feel adequate when_____ (fill in desired outcome that you attach to your sense of worth).

However, there are many people who have all of the above and still do not feel a deep sense of self-esteem. That's because self-esteem has nothing to do with anything external, such as looks, approval, money, relationships with others, or having a baby.

Self-esteem, or the lack of it, is solely the result of how we see ourselves and treat ourselves. Those people who attend to their own feelings and needs with loving action on their own behalf feel good about themselves, while those people who ignore, invalidate, or judge their own feelings and needs, feel badly about themselves.

Richard, a client of mine, is a very successful businessman. He is wealthy, lives in a big house, has expensive cars, a lovely wife and three children. But Richard consulted with me because of his low self-esteem. He was perplexed that he continued to feel so inadequate in spite of all that he had achieved and all that he had.

As we worked together with Inner Bonding, it became apparent that, no matter what the outer truth was, Richard continued to see himself as the inadequate child his father told him he was. His inner dialogue was often self-critical, just as his father had been with him. And not only did Richard constantly judge himself as his father had judged him,

he treated himself as his father had treated him - ignoring his own feelings and needs. As a result, Richard was always looking to others for the attention and approval that he didn't receive from his father, and was not giving to himself. Instead of being a loving parent to the child within him, he was a harsh and inattentive inner parent - until he started to practice Inner Bonding.

Jackie, another client of mine, is a very successful actress. Yet fame and fortune have not given her self-esteem. No matter how often people tell her how beautiful and talented she is, she still feels inadequate and insecure most of the time. This is because, on the inner level, Jackie is constantly telling herself that she is stupid. "How could I have made that stupid remark!" "How could I have acted so stupid?" Mirroring her mother's own self-judgments and her judgments toward Jackie, she constantly puts herself down. Until Jackie learns, through her Inner Bonding practice, to see herself through eyes of truth rather than eyes of judgment, she will continue to feel inadequate and insecure.

Anna grew up with parents who were hardworking and very caring about their children, but who didn't take good care of themselves. Both of her parents smoked, drank too much, and didn't eat well. Neither of them took responsibility for their own feelings, so both of them were anxious or depressed much of the time. Even though her parents were loving to her, Anna does not take good care of herself, having had no role modeling for personal responsibility. She doesn't eat well or get enough exercise, doesn't stand up for herself at home or at work, and doesn't get enough rest or playtime. She is very attractive, makes lots of money, has a husband and children, yet often feels very insecure.

If you imagine that her feelings and needs are like a child within, you can begin to see why she doesn't feel good about herself. Treating herself badly will always result in feeling badly. She will not feel good about herself until she treats herself as a worthwhile person.

It seems like a vicious cycle. How can Anna be motivated to take loving care of herself when she doesn't yet feel good about herself? There is a way out. Anna doesn't feel motivated to take care of herself because she thinks that who she is, is her ego, the wounded part of herself, whom she doesn't like. Yet if Anna opens to knowing who she really is - that she is a beautiful and perfect child of God, that her essence, her true Self is a spark of the Divine, created in the image of Love - she will want to take loving care of this wonderful soul within.

As Anna begins to practice Inner Bonding and learns to take loving care of herself, the part of herself that has low self-esteem - her wounded self - begins to heal. The more Anna feeds herself well, gets enough exercise and rest, speaks up for herself and tells her truth, takes care of her financial situation, organizes her time and environment, treats others with kindness and compassion, and opens to her spiritual Guidance or Higher Power, the better she feels about herself.

Self-esteem is the result of taking loving action, not the cause of it. Since we all have free will, we each have the choice to take loving action on our own behalf. Loving actions might include:

- Speaking up for yourself with others and telling your truth without blame or judgment in conflict situations.
- Taking care of your body through eating well, getting enough exercise, enough sleep, and so on.
- Creating a balance between work, rest, play and creative time.
- Treating yourself and others with respect and compassion, rather than with judgment.
- Attending to - rather than ignoring - your own feelings and needs.
- Taking the time to pray and meditate.
- Choosing to notice your thoughts, and practicing inner self-discipline regarding your thoughts.
- Choosing gratitude throughout the day.

It doesn't matter how badly you were treated as a child, or how badly your parents treated themselves. Your actions need never be governed by your past. When taking loving action in your own behalf replaces your inattentive and judgmental behavior toward yourself, you will discover that the result is high self-esteem.

Addiction to Self-Judgment

By Dr. Margaret Paul

"I'm such a jerk. How could I have said that?"
"I'm a loser. I'll never get anywhere."
"I'm so stupid. I should have learned this by now."
"I don't fit in. I don't belong with these people."
"I'll never be good enough. I'll never do it right."
"I'm permanently emotionally damaged. I'll never be okay."
"No one could love me. I'm not lovable."

...and on and on.

Are you aware of your self-judgments? Are you aware of how often you judge yourself as bad, wrong or inadequate? Are you aware of how you end up feeling as a result of your self-judgments?

In my counseling work with people, I find that self-judgment is one of the major causes of fear, anger, anxiety and depression. Yet most people don't realize that these painful feelings are the result of their own thoughts, their own self-judgments. Most of the time, when I ask an anxious client why they are feeling anxious, they tell me that it's because of something that happened to them. They usually believe that an event or a person caused their anxiety. Yet when I ask them what they are thinking that might be causing their anxiety, they will tell me a self-judgment such as, "I'll never get this right," or they are projecting their own judgment onto me and telling themselves, "Margaret doesn't like me," or "Margaret is getting impatient with me." When they judge themselves or make up that I'm judging them, they get anxious. There is nothing actually happening that is causing their anxiety, other than their own thoughts.

Pointing out to them that they are causing their anxiety with their self-judgment doesn't necessarily stop the judgment. This is because self-judgment is often an addiction. An addiction is a habitual behavior that is intended to protect against pain. What is the pain that self-judgment is intended to protect against?

Generally, the hope of self-judgment is to protect against rejection and failure. The false beliefs are that, "If I judge myself, then others won't judge me and reject me. I can be safe from others' judgment by judging myself first," or "If I judge myself, I can motivate myself to do

things right and succeed. Then I will feel safe and be loved and accepted by others."

However, just as a child does far better in school with encouragement than with criticism, so do we as adults. Criticism tends to scare and immobilize us. Instead of motivating us, it often creates so much anxiety that we get frozen and become unable to take appropriate action for ourselves. More self-judgment follows the lack of action, which results in more anxiety and immobilization, until we create a situation where we are completely stuck and miserable.

The way out of this is to practice Inner Bonding, becoming aware of the feelings of fear, anxiety, anger or depression and then asking yourself, "What did I just tell myself that is creating this feeling?" Once you become aware of the self-judgment, you can then ask yourself, "Am I certain that what I am telling myself is true?" If you are not 100% certain that what you are telling yourself is true, you can ask your higher, wise self or a spiritual source of wisdom, "What is the truth?" If you are really open to learning about the truth, the truth will pop into your mind, and it will be much different than what you have been telling yourself.

For example, "I'm such a jerk. How could I have said that?" becomes "We all mess up at times. It's okay to make mistakes - it's part of being human. Making a mistake does not mean you are a jerk." When we open to the truth, we will discover a kind and compassionate way of speaking to ourselves, a way that makes us feel loved and safe, rather than anxious, angry or depressed.

Addictions are always challenging to resolve, and an addiction to self-judgment is no exception. So be easy on yourself, and don't judge yourself for judging yourself! It will take time and dedication to become aware of your self-judgments and learn to be kind toward yourself, but the end result is so worth the effort!

The End of Shame

By Dr. Margaret Paul

"I have no value."

"I'm not good enough."

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"I don't like myself."

"If they really knew me, they wouldn't like me."

"I don't deserve to be loved by God."

"I'm not important."

"My inner child doesn't deserve to be loved by me."

I hear some form of this over and over from my clients. Shame is a very big issue.

Shame comes from two different places: others shame us and we shame ourselves.

Shame from Others

Lindsay was abused in many ways, as a child, by her father. Her father used to tell her that she was ugly, that she shouldn't have been born, that she was garbage. He would hit her with a belt with no provocation, and often touched her inappropriately. Of course, she grew up believing that she had no value.

When parents, teachers, siblings, and other children shame, ridicule, taunt, bully, or physically or sexually abuse a child, the child absorbs the shame. They have no way of knowing that they are pure innocent children of God (whatever God is for you), no way of knowing that the abusers are wrong about them. They grow up believing they are worthless.

Shaming Yourself

When Lindsay started to work with me, she had been shaming herself for years. She did not realize that, at this point in her life, she was the one causing herself to feel badly about herself. She would shame herself and then project her self-judgments onto others, believing they felt about her the way she felt about herself.

Her wounded self was totally in charge, and had deeply absorbed the false beliefs handed down to her from her abusive father and mousy mother.

Healing Shame

Lindsay was tired of feeling badly about herself and ready to learn to heal her shame. First, she needed to acknowledge what had really happened in her childhood. I can't tell you how often the people I work

with trivialize and diminish what happened to them as children. "Oh, it wasn't that bad - I'm sure people had it worse than me." Trivializing and diminishing what happened to you is in itself self-abusive. It's as if a child comes to you and tells you of abuse and instead of taking it seriously, you say, "I don't believe you," or "It's not a big deal." This is what Lindsay was doing when her inner child started to tell her what life was like for her as a child.

I helped Lindsay to acknowledge how lonely, helpless and heartbroken she felt daily as a child. She started to cry for the first time in years. Feeling seen and heard by her Adult, her child told her more and more about the events that caused such deep pain. Lindsay was able to see where the judgmental voice in her head came from.

Soon, Lindsay was able to connect her bad feelings about herself with her own self-judgments. She learned to immediately feel the shame and insecurity she caused herself every time she blamed and shamed herself, and she learned to open to her spiritual Guidance for the truth of her core Self. The more aware she became of the connection between feeling worthless and her blaming and shaming thoughts toward herself, the easier time she had letting go of her programmed false beliefs about herself. She started to treat herself as the sweet, kind and caring person she is.

Lindsay became very devoted to her Inner Bonding practice, and within a few months was feeling much happier. She was able to stop smoking, something she had tried over and over to do before learning how to love herself. She is making new friends and beginning to do the creative and fun things that she has always wanted to do. She is feeling alive and passionate about her life!

