



YOU...Improved

a guide to

Healing Your Self Esteem

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INTRODUCTION

My Personal Journey with Low Self Esteem

If you were to turn back the clock to about 12 years ago you would find me sitting in my parents' living room sobbing uncontrollably. I had just been told that I had to go to a 30 day in-patient treatment for my gambling addiction.

I was devastated at the thought of NEVER being able to gamble again.

More than that, though, in that very moment I was taking a good, hard look at my life and wondering "WHY?? Why can't my life have turned out differently than this? What did I do to deserve this? Why doesn't anything ever work out for me? Why can't I just be happy?"

I was 21 years old, still living in the basement of my parent's house, unable to hold a steady job, bouncing from one unhealthy relationship to the next, dressing and acting provocatively just for attention, and gambling as much as \$10,000 per month.

I was stealing from and lying to the people I loved most in the world.

I hated myself. I hated what I had become. I hated the world for doing this to me. At that moment I honestly couldn't imagine how I was going to possibly survive the next 30 days of my life.

I also couldn't figure out how I had changed from the sweet, caring girl that I had been into the monster that I had become.

Little did I know that going to treatment for my gambling addiction was going to be the best thing that had ever happened to me.

It was in treatment that I first began to look at why I did the things I did and why the course of my life was never quite what I had hoped for.

What I learned is that absolutely everything that led me down the path to becoming a full blown addict originated because I had low self esteem and never felt I was good enough.

When I entered treatment it was with skewed thinking. I felt so sorry for myself and viewed myself as a victim of a bad life. I had been plagued with bad relationships and bad luck.

I resented that I had been cursed with such a crummy life....more than that, though, I *clung* to my resentment, saw only despair and misery, and blamed everyone else for my problems.

I had become cynical and pessimistic. I believed that everything I tried was doomed to fail and that my only recourse was to react to the failures instead of making a change to take control of my life.

During the course of treatment I learned that I had to stop blaming others, stop feeling like a victim, take back my life, assume responsibility for my own actions and learn to love myself in order to truly find happiness.

That sounds like a pretty big task, huh? Don't worry - it isn't as difficult as it sounds.

Over the past 12 years in recovery I have discovered solid, simple ways of changing my thinking to heal my self esteem and have learned to love myself the way I am....flaws, failures and all.

My goal in writing this book is to pass along to you what I have learned so that you too can be more gentle and forgiving with yourself, achieve your dreams, stop feeling like a victim and get control of your life....and most importantly find ultimate happiness.

I'd like to give a special thanks to all the counselors at the Rimrock Foundation, my counselor Sherry, and my family and friends for sticking with me through the hard times and always supporting me.

The information I share in this book is a combination of what I learned from my counselors in treatment, in counseling after treatment and through my life experience.

It is my *sincere hope* that it helps you to find the happiness and joy that you have been seeking.

Beth

What Exactly *IS* Self Esteem?

Self Esteem Defined:

"The experience of being capable of meeting life's challenges and being worthy of happiness."

From the National Association for Self-Esteem

If you are like a lot of people, you might think that self esteem is simply "feeling good about yourself".

There's actually a lot more to it than that.

Do you like yourself? Can you set goals and achieve them? Do you allow yourself to fail and reward yourself when you succeed? How important do you think you are?

Do you take responsibility for your actions and feelings? Do you know *who you really are* as a person? Do you stand up for yourself and what you believe in?

All of these things are a part of self esteem.

It's about how much you value and respect yourself as a person and how you tackle problems when they come up.

High self esteem allows you to love yourself just the way you are.

It helps you to establish your own identity and have a clear idea of what you want in life. Not only that, but it gives you the courage to reach for your dreams.

It's about how you function on a day-to-day basis and what thoughts fill your mind.

To help you get a better idea of exactly what it is, let's take a look at some of the things that determine your self esteem:

- How important you feel you are
- How you feel about and deal with your accomplishments and failures
- Your ability to set goals and achieve them
- Your ability to take appropriate risks both personally and professionally
- How much you like and respect yourself
- How you perceive yourself as a human being
- Your ability to take responsibility for your life and your feelings

Your own personal level of self esteem and your mental self-image (how you view yourself in your mind) determine nearly every aspect of your life.

The difference between having high self esteem and low self esteem can mean the difference between success and failure, happiness and despair, strong loving relationships and dysfunctional, unhealthy relationships.

It can determine whether or not you pursue your goals and dreams or stay stuck where you are.

It affects your relationships, family life, career, money & finances, health and overall happiness.

Low self esteem can even lead to difficulties such as addiction, eating disorders, co-dependency, anxiety, stress, dropping out of school, low grades, poor job performance (or inability to even hold a job), depression, low self confidence, poor social skills, thoughts of suicide, isolation, loneliness and more.

Incidentally, you should know that it is possible to have high self esteem in some areas of your life and low self esteem in other areas.

For instance, you might feel like you are good at your job but that you are unlovable. As a result you may have great success at work but your relationships are unhealthy and unfulfilling.

If you suffer from low self esteem you might find yourself repeating the same mistakes over and over in your life...stuck in unhealthy relationships, constantly at odds with your job, always feeling like there should be something more to life and looking for that "something" in all the wrong places.

"A man who finds no satisfaction in himself will seek for it in vain elsewhere."

-- La Rochefoucauld

This quote from La Rochefoucauld defines one of the major problems with low self esteem that eventually leads to so many of the associated negative consequences.

Because people with low self esteem do not love or respect themselves they seek happiness from external sources which all inevitably fail.

The only way to truly be happy is to learn to be happy with yourself.

High self esteem, on the other hand, can allow you to achieve whatever you set your mind to and live a richer, fuller, more fulfilling life.

When you learn to value and appreciate yourself everything else in your life will start to fall into place.

Your relationships with your friends and family will be stronger and more fulfilling. In fact, the more you start to like yourself the more likeable you will become.

As you begin to believe in yourself and your abilities you will be more likely to accomplish your goals and dreams. You will start taking responsibility for your own life and actions and stop playing the role of victim.

You will begin to make smarter choices with your career and your finances.

Taking care of yourself and making sure your needs are met will become a priority for you and as a result your overall health, happiness and well-being will improve.

Taking the time to improve your self image and to heal your self esteem is one of the most important things you can do for yourself.

Congratulations on taking the first step toward changing your life to be the way you have always dreamed it could be.

What Causes Low Self Esteem?

The vast majority of your beliefs and perceptions are formed during childhood and stay with you into your adult life.

As a result, if you formed unhealthy or dysfunctional thoughts early on in your life they can still be with you today and can affect the way that you see both yourself and the world around you.

When you were a child you were probably confronted by situations that challenged your self esteem on a regular basis.

Some people think that low self esteem only happens if you grew up in an extremely dysfunctional family, suffered abuse or had some other traumatic experience early on.

The truth is, though, that even growing up in a loving home and having a fairly normal childhood there are still plenty of things that can do damage to how you view yourself and can warp your perceptions of the events around you.

When you are a child your parents are the most important figures in your life. Since they are so important to you their actions and words can have a profound effect on your self-image and self esteem.

When you were born you didn't come with an owner's manual.

That means that even if your parents loved you and had the best of intentions, they still may have inadvertently said or done things that negatively affected your views of yourself.

For instance, one of the most common mistakes that many parents make is punishing their *child* rather than their *child's behavior*.

When a parent says something to you like "you make me angry" rather than "when you do that it makes me feel angry", the problem seems to be *you* and not just what you did.

Even relatively small occurrences like this can lead to feelings of shame or can cause you to think that you are responsible for the happiness of your parents or the people around you.

If you grew up in a dysfunctional home or suffered abuse as a child the damage to your self esteem can be even more significant.

Not having the support and love that you need as a child, frequently being yelled at, having to be a caretaker, not feeling safe in your own home or any number of other complications that come along with an unhealthy home life can harm you in many ways.

You may feel worthless or like nothing you do is ever good enough. You might also come to believe that you are responsible for other people's happiness or fear intimacy because you are afraid the other person will abandon you.

While there is no doubt that your parents and your early family life have a significant impact on shaping your views of the world, there are plenty of other things that can warp your feelings about yourself.

Being teased, ridiculed, harshly criticized, ignored, left out, not allowed to express yourself, or expected to be perfect can all harm your self esteem.

Teachers, coaches, family members, classmates and anyone else you come in contact with as a child can all cause you to change the way you view yourself as a person.

You might have developed perceptions that you were too thin, too fat, too short, too tall, too stupid, too different, or just not good enough in some way as a result of the messages you received from the people around you.

Although low self esteem usually does start during childhood, it can also develop at any point in your life.

For instance, the images that you see on television and in magazines can be very damaging to your self esteem.

In today's world it seems like everywhere you look there are images of glamorous, beautiful, successful people who seem to have it all. Trying to live up to these impossible standards of beauty or success can leave you feeling less than adequate.

Society also tends to place a great deal of value on material success.

Not having a good job, big house, nice car or all the outer trappings of success can make you feel like you don't measure up.

Failed relationships, divorce, the death of someone close to you, losing a job or any other significant life event are all things that can harm the way you view yourself and the world around you.

Another part of the problem with low self esteem is that it feeds on itself.

Each time you experience a negative consequence as a result of your low self esteem it only serves to reinforce your negative self-image.

For instance, if you have difficulties in your relationships because of low self esteem it will reinforce the idea in your mind that you are unlovable or that there is something wrong with you.

This "proof" can further lower your self esteem and make you come to believe the negative ideas you have about yourself even more.

Because of this, the longer you live with negative views of yourself or the world around you the further downward your self esteem can spiral.

In order to break out of the cycle you need to overcome the negative thoughts and perceptions that you have and begin viewing yourself and the world in a more rational, healthy light.

Here is a list of a few things that can cause low self esteem.

As you read through the list try to think if any of these apply to you. If not, try to think back through your life and determine any situations that may have made you feel bad or like a failure.

- You weren't encouraged or praised enough for your accomplishments by your parents or teachers when you were growing up.
- A teacher inadvertently or purposely embarrassed you in front of your class.
- Other kids picked on you or teased you and made you feel inferior.
- You have gone through a painful divorce.
- Your own parents divorced, which may have caused you to feel that you were unlovable and that you were somewhat responsible.
- You feel that you can't live up to the impossible standard of beauty that is prevalent in the media.
- You were either overweight or too thin growing up (or now) and were teased because of that.
- You have been in (or are in) a relationship where your partner or spouse belittled you, talked down to you or treated your opinions and ideas as if they didn't matter.

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- You feel like you don't make enough money or have enough material success.
- You have been in a situation where you felt incredibly embarrassed or inadequate.
- A friend, parent, sibling or other loved one made a comment that hurt your feelings or made you feel bad about yourself.
- You were raised believing that your appearance (how you look) was of paramount importance, and as you age you feel you are "losing your looks" and have nothing left to offer the world.
- You didn't get good grades in school and were made to feel dumb or inadequate because of it.
- You grew up in a dysfunctional or addictive family.
- You lost a job or can't hold down a job.
- You don't know how to manage money.
- You were abused as a child (or at any point in your life.)

Obviously there are many more things that can cause low self esteem besides the ones in this list and I would encourage you to take some time to think of the things that may have negatively affected how you see yourself, either growing up or more recently in your life.

The point here is not to dwell on the past or all the "bad" things that happened in your life.

Instead, it is to help you get an understanding of why you feel the way you do.

As you work through this book you will learn how to let the negative experiences from your past go and develop healthier ways of thinking.

For now let's look at how low self esteem can skew your perceptions and change the way you see the world.

You've been reading a free chapter from the book *YOU...Improved – A Guide to Healing Your Self Esteem*.

The *YOU...Improved* program consists of the rest of this book (over 130 pages) along with an exercise book packed with exercises designed to help you:

- learn to love yourself
- start setting goals
- let go of the past
- adopt a more positive outlook
- overcome perfectionism
- improve your body image
- build your self esteem

- increase your self confidence
- overcome shyness
- and more.....

If you are really ready to take the first step and start making your life the way you always dreamed it could be, get the rest of this course at:

<http://www.improvedselfesteem.com>