



What is Self-Esteem?
**By Kathryn Casey, Owner and Coach at
The Good Life – Life Coaching**

Perhaps you've heard the term self-esteem. It gets thrown around here. Can you define it? Before opening The Good Life – Life Coaching, I worked with high school students through the Center for Human Services. Schools care a lot about students' self-esteem. When I asked clients what self-esteem is many couldn't quite put it in to words.

A simple definition for self-esteem is "how you feel about yourself." Strictly speaking, this stays in the realm of feelings and can change day-to-day, morning-by-morning. Research finds self-esteem is roughly equal in boys and girls and then plummets for girls at the onset of adolescence. Women generally have lower self-esteem than men.

As a feeling, why does it matter? Feelings can act as indicator lights, letting us know when there is a problem. If my child is generally confident, but then suddenly

shows a change in how he talks about himself, indicating low self-esteem, that is a warning to me to sit down and try to understand what's going on his life and how its affecting him.

If you're struggling with low self-esteem, I'd invite you to do two things. First, check out the previous article on gratitude and start that gratitude journal. Then, on top of writing three things you're grateful for, also write three things you did well that day and the positive quality it demonstrated. "I got a good review. This tells me I'm a hard worker." The language of "this tells me" is particularly important because the good actions we do are, not warning lights, but signs of those steady character traits we call virtues. To be a virtuous person, means you're slowing but surely getting the hang of how to live a fulfilling life.

Watch out for pessimistic thoughts creeping in. You might attempt to name something good you did and what it tells you, then an antagonistic thought comes into mind telling you it was just chance or only went well because of the other guy.

These habits can be really helpful to discuss with a therapist or life coach in order to gain insight on how they're affecting you and find ways to change those habits.

How do we combine this idea of self-esteem and the idea of a steady character? It starts with looking at the overall narrative of those feelings.

When one has steady high self-esteem this is called pride. Not the negative version of pride, "he's so prideful" but more like pride in one's work. We need that feeling. Like all virtues, pride has extremes in two directions: arrogance or false humility. In false humility, I don't give myself any credit. I think I'm dirt. True humility is the right balance of pride. I judge myself truthfully and take the appropriate amount of pride in what I have done, giving myself due credit. It's a matter of justice.

Loving and appreciating yourself is not selfishness, self-absorption or narcissism. Love means I want the good for another. If I love myself, it means I want good for myself. I won't expose myself to toxic relationships. I will seek ways to be healthy, successful and happy. If I can love myself in this way, wanting good for myself, then I can fully understand how to love others. Too often we get that mixed up where I want good for others but treat myself badly. Having this regard for myself, taking action to care for myself, will make me freer to love those around me. I will doubt myself less, compare myself less, and have healthier mutual relationships.

How would someone who loves you describe you? How does he or she treat you? Would you say or do the same for yourself, or brush yourself aside? On the flip side, if you know you're "worth it," do others treat you the way you deserve, or do you make excuses for their behavior? Adequate self-love, pride, good ol' healthy self-esteem mean we keep a high standard for how we ought to be treated.

Kathryn Casey operates The Good Life – Life Coaching, in Hughson. For a copy of this article and to read previous installments of "Here's to the Good Life!", check out Coachingthegoodlife.org/Resources