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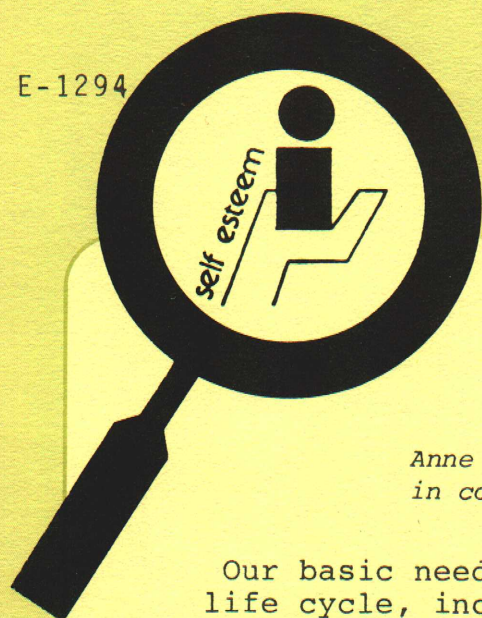
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The Later Years – Measuring Your Self-Esteem  
Michigan State University Extension Service  
Anne K. Soderman, Family and Child Sciences  
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# The Later Years



## VI. MEASURING YOUR SELF-ESTEEM

*Anne K. Soderman, Department of Family and Child Sciences,  
in cooperation with the Human Development Impact Committee*

Our basic needs as human beings are fairly stable over the life cycle, including our later years. Primary are the needs to feel secure, both psychologically and economically ... to be accepted as a competent human being ... to be accorded the opportunity to exercise one's decision-making ability ... and to meet with some measure of personal gratification that confirms in us a reason for existing. When these needs are met, we feel cared for as well as "cared about." We are free, then, to actively care for others. It is through this giving and taking that human bridges are formed and our feelings about ourselves and others are developed.

### Self-Esteem In The Early And Later Years

Self-esteem, or the way we feel about ourselves, is a cumulative process and is dependent upon our experiences with others over a lifetime. It can be likened to a ledger account that sums up our current feelings of individual worth.

The positive investments made in us in our early years by people who were most important to us serve as later "assets," as do all the other gratifying experiences we have over a lifetime. They are the bolsters we have that support us in times of stress. Negative experiences and expectations line up as liabilities.

There is always a current "balance" in our self-esteem ledgers that is dependent upon how well our human needs are being met at any particular period in

our lives. That balance may be reflected in how happy we feel, how adaptive we are to change in our lives, the optimism and enthusiasm we express for the future, and the effort we use in determining the direction of our own lives.

A depleted self-esteem balance is reflected in over-dependency on others, social withdrawal or inactivity, a reluctance to adapt to new situations, an uncooperative or cranky attitude in dealing with others, or an "over-the-hill," "no-use-trying" attitude.



Dr. Eleanor Luckey, of Connecticut State University, writes: "The loss of self-esteem and the necessity of finding it in order to become an autonomous person may well be part of man's dilemma -- a part of the struggle every man encounters as he

faces the good and evil in himself." That struggle must continue into our later years if we are to preserve our dignity as human beings. We need to continue, as before, to nurture our own development by our interest in and service to others.

## Check Yourself Today

Periodic personal evaluation is important, especially in the later years when we are no longer forced to be adaptive or to be seekers of new roles. Too often, we accept our society's rather negative concept of aging and the aged. It may influence our perception of our own unique skills and abilities as we move into the later years. Following is a self-esteem "ledger." Give yourself a point for each "yes." Take two points off for each "no." Does your total reflect a positive or negative balance? What can you actively do to increase your assets?

YES

NO

- |     |     |   |
|-----|-----|---|
| ___ | ___ | I feel important to someone.                                    |
| ___ | ___ | I watch my eating habits.                                       |
| ___ | ___ | I am careful about my personal appearance.                      |
| ___ | ___ | I maintain contact with other people every day.                 |
| ___ | ___ | I accept growing older as a reality of life.                    |
| ___ | ___ | I like life, like living, and am looking forward to the future. |
| ___ | ___ | I have interesting plans for today.                             |
| ___ | ___ | I have interesting plans for tomorrow.                          |
| ___ | ___ | I feel respected.   |
| ___ | ___ | I am satisfied with my present living arrangements.             |
| ___ | ___ | I regularly exercise my body.                                   |
| ___ | ___ | I regularly exercise my mind with challenging ideas.            |
| ___ | ___ | I welcome new experiences.                                      |
| ___ | ___ | I am willing to accept responsibility.                          |

YES

NO

- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ I feel there is a purpose to my life.
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Each day, I meet all of my nutritional needs.
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ I contribute as well as take.
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ I see myself as a person, not as just a "senior citizen."
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ I talk to people more than I watch TV.
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ I have a hobby or two.
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ I am able to make new friends and am in a position to do so.
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ I have maintained a social role in my community -- through my church, volunteer activities, or other organizations.
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Other people are important to me.
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ I get along with others pretty well.
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ I like myself.
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ I am interested in what other people think, including young people.
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ I am flexible.
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ I try to see the positive side of situations rather than finding fault.
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ I like to be around people of all ages.
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ I try not to make unkind remarks about others.
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ I feel I have an adequate income.
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ I feel productive.
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ I feel motivated to get up in the morning.

\_\_\_ \_\_\_ TOTAL

If your self-esteem ledger shows a current balance that is positive, congratulations! You are probably enjoying life. If you recorded more negative than positive responses, however, begin now to "balance" your self-worth and increase your assets. A good start might be to review any liabilities and to make some measurable effort each day toward a more positive approach to

living. That effort may simply involve our taking a greater interest in others. We have tremendous potential in the later years to support the growth of healthy self-esteem in those who are close to us ... our adult children, our grandchildren, and our friends. Promoting our own self-esteem is often a matter of recognizing our own individual potential and putting it to work for ourselves and others.

### REFERENCES AND RECOMMENDED READING

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