



THE LATER YEARS of LIFE

6.

Measuring Your Self-Esteem

1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30
31	32	33	34	35	36
37	38	39	40	41	42
43	44	45	46	47	48
49	50	51	52	53	54
55	56	57	58	59	60
61	62	63	64	65	66
67	68	69	70	71	72
73	74	75	76	77	78
79	80	81	82	83	84
85	86	87	88	89	90
91	92	93	94	95	96
97	98	99	100	101	102
103	104	105	106	107	108

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 our 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 and personal loss. 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 . . . 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 you assets?

- | Yes | No |
|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> I feel important to someone. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> I watch my eating habits. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> I am careful about my personal appearance. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> I maintain contact with other people every day. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> I accept growing older as a reality of life. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> I like life, like living, and am looking forward to the future. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> I have interesting plans for today. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> I have interesting plans for tomorrow. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> I feel respected. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> I am satisfied with my present living arrangements. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> I exercise regularly. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> I regularly exercise my mind with challenging ideas. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> I welcome new experiences. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> I am willing to accept responsibility. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> I feel there is a purpose to my life. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> Each day, I meet all of my nutritional needs. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> I contribute as well as take. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> I see myself as a person, not as just a "senior citizen." |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> I talk to people more than I watch TV. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> I have a hobby or two. |

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In cooperation with
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Impact Committee

Yes No

- 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

- Sharon Curtin. **Nobody Ever Died of Old Age.** Boston: Little, Brown, 1972, 228 pp.
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