

Self-Encouragement

You may believe that your self-esteem will increase if you could just get more recognition and praise from others. Ironically, this would actually cause your self-esteem to plummet. Why? Because self-esteem is built from the inside; that's why it's called *self*-esteem!

Praise and recognition is a form of "other-esteem." Praise tells you that someone else thinks your actions are acceptable or valued. The opposite of praise is criticism, it's the negative version of other-esteem, where someone has determined that your actions fall short of their expectations. Praise and criticism both offer an external perspective on your worth and contribution. They allow you to look outside yourself to see what others think or feel about you and your behavior.



Praise is not a bad thing, we all give it and we often get it. But forming a dependence on praise makes you reliant on others to hold you up, to tell you that you are worthwhile and important. If, at any given time, you don't receive the praise or recognition you are seeking, you may end up feeling badly about yourself. You may work harder, act better, and struggle mightily to please others in order to get your dose of praise. It's a tricky thing. You will likely never feel fully satisfied or at peace if you are praise dependent, because there is always someone else to please. This can be exhausting!

In parenting children, experts suggest that you balance praise with a healthy dose of encouragement. Where praise is external, encouragement invites the child to assess for themselves if they are pleased or not with their own behavior. When a child asks a parent, "Do you like my drawing?", a praising parent would respond by pointing out what they like in their child's artwork. If a parent were to offer encouragement instead, they would ask the child, "What do *you* like about your drawing? You seem happy with it. Tell me about it." This response encourages the child to assess for themselves what they like or don't like about their work. If the child wishes their drawing were different, an encouraging parent would help the child explore what the child could do to make their project more satisfying. When a child learns to evaluate their behavior for themselves they are less dependent on what others think and more focused on designing their actions to be satisfying and pleasing to themselves. This is called high self-esteem.

These same principles for creating self-esteem in children can be learned by and applied to adults in the form of self-encouragement. With self-encouragement you can assess for yourself whether *you* believe your actions, thoughts, and feelings are pleasing or worthwhile. You ask yourself, "Am I being the kind of person I desire to be?" You can stop and listen to your own critique, whether positive or negative, and

determine if *you* are content with the way you are living your life. With self-encouragement you own the responsibility for assessing and adjusting things to meet your values and expectations.

If you haven't learned to listen to your own evaluation it's not too late to start. You can wear a Self-Esteem Builder bracelet, a band that is marked with the question, "Do I like it?" (available at www.CourageToBloom.com). The bracelet simply asks you to evaluate, many times a day, if you like how you're living the detailed aspects of your life (e.g., Do I like how I'm talking to my friend?, Do I like how I'm driving the car?, Do I like what I'm eating? etc.). Whenever you notice the bracelet, check in with yourself by asking yourself if you like what you are doing, thinking, or feeling in that very moment.

- If your answer is "yes" then smile at your success at living your life as you desire.
- If your answer is "no" then you have some work to do. Start by visioning how you would rather be living your life. This is a powerful exercise. It's an opportunity to focus on what you want and how you want to be. Design a response that meets with your own standards, desires, and vision of the self you want to create. (Remember to focus on you and your power to choose your thoughts, feelings, actions, and attitudes, not on how others should be.)

Wear the bracelet until it loses its potency to remind you to check-in. Then, pass the bracelet along to someone else and teach them how they can build their own self-esteem.

"It's not your job to like me; that's my job."