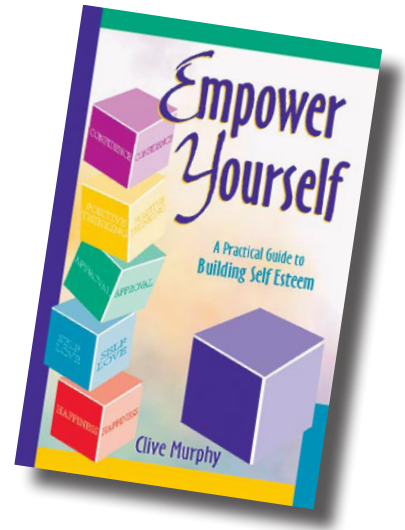


Empower Yourself:

A Practical Guide To Building Self Esteem

An Introduction...

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Chapter 1

MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICES

High self esteem is your greatest asset. It allows you to feel good about yourself and what is happening in your world. With it, you maximise your chances of doing well in all areas of life. Without it, you are liable to suffer emotionally and possibly physically.

While you are told you need to have high self esteem and believe in yourself, the question asked is "How do you do that?" The words are easy to say. Achieving it is more difficult.

Self esteem and other relevant life skills are things that are seldom taught. Speaking to teenagers who have just left school, I find they know very little about self esteem and other skills like the ones needed to succeed in a relationship. While school teaches many subjects, it fails to teach them the skills essential to succeed in life. Without these skills there is a good chance they will suffer in some way.

When you buy a new computer, stereo, digital watch or car you receive a manual. When you wish to find out how the product works you consult the manual. Without it you would be lost. Try working a new computer program without the help of a manual. It is not only difficult, it can be downright frustrating. It is trial and error as you work your way through it. Eventually you get there.

In life you are born without a manual. You have a mind, yet are never taught how it works and how to control it, and you can only control something when you know how it works - like the new computer program. You have a body and nobody explains how it functions or how to fuel it properly. You form a relationship with little knowledge on how to make it succeed (which reinforces why there is such a high divorce rate in both first and second marriages). You become parents and are not taught how to raise children successfully.

The essential information needed to live a happy and successful life is seldom taught with the result most people struggle at some point in their life. While many tend to muddle their way through crises, others tend to wallow in them resulting in depression, anxiety, drug and alcohol abuse and even suicide. The sad part is, statistics indicate these states and the use of these chemicals are on the rise indicating the lack of coping skills people have to handle negative situations.

In my mid-thirties I considered my life to be generally good. I had a great job as a sales representative, had just taken out a loan to purchase my first home and was enjoying bachelor life. When things went wrong they seemed to do so with a vengeance. Relationships were the worst as I was constantly being rejected for someone else. It came to a peak when I was 34 with yet another relationship break-up. The devastation became so bad I ended up in hospital with chest pains. I could not understand how I could continue to produce the same result. A couple of weeks after discharge from hospital, my employer told me my services with the company were no longer needed. Not only did I have a broken heart, I had a mortgage to pay off without income. I genuinely felt life had nothing to offer.

A friend suggested I do a self-help course. I did several, including clinical hypnotherapy. I wanted to make sure I never felt that bad again. I also sought counselling, read books, attended self development seminars and began a practice helping others.

With all my new knowledge I believed I was on a path to success. I soon came back to earth with a thud. A relationship I was enjoying did not work out and I reluctantly ended it. I thought I was in control, as I was the one who ended it. I wasn't. I experienced the same pain as in previous re-

lationship break-ups. I read more books and received professional help in a bid to move forward. Relationships were still a struggle.

I was determined to get my life in order. Through helping others I began to find answers to my own problems. One day I put a new way of overcoming rejection on my white board in an attempt to help a client. It achieved brilliant results. After the session I thought: Maybe I had better apply this to myself. It completely changed my life in an instant.

I am now very happily married with two great step children and one child of my own. Having turned my life around, I believe every person has the ability to do the same.

Everyone Is Programmed Differently

Your mental programming determines how well you process your world. Whatever is programmed in determines what comes out. Your mind is similar to a computer.

Your programming begins around the fourth month in the womb. Many parents wrongly believe the baby begins to process information immediately after birth. That baby in the womb begins to take in information which continues until the moment it dies.

Before birth, the baby is aware of the feelings of the mother and has experiences of it's own.

The emotional state of the mother can influence how a baby feels. Parents outline how playing soft relaxing music and talking to a baby in the womb tend to produce a "quiet" baby.

The way you process your world is basically determined by two factors: what you learn and the experiences you go through. Imagine your mind at the start as being empty. It then begins to fill with information. Much of this information comes from your parents and the people who are closest to you. As you spend a lot of time with your parents you begin to do things the way they do, as this is all that is programmed in. If you live in a family where yelling and violence are the norm, you accept this as the norm. A client related how, at the age of eight, she went to stay with a friend. She was most upset there was no yelling and fighting as she believed all families behaved like this.

I frequently hear clients say they have become adults with the same traits as their parents. They even possess some traits they dislike as they have been programmed over many years.

Because parents have a great impact on their children, it is very important to think about the way you want your children programmed. If you wish to give them the best start ensure you program positive loving things. Babies absorb new information like a sponge and this becomes their reality. They do not know the difference between right and wrong until programmed.

The younger the child the more important the programming. Many step-parents I consult with relate that, even though one parent left the family when the child was young, the child continued to exhibit traits of how that parent behaved. The parent who had left had a large influence in the baby's first year of life.

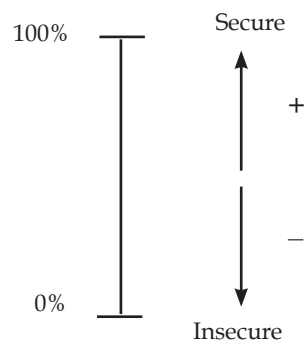


Figure 1.

Other factors having a large impact on how you process what happens in your life are the experiences you go through. Some of the experiences to affect children include being degraded, ignored, teased and physically and sexually abused.

Whenever you have a bad experience, that event is stored as memory and continues to affect you exactly as it was programmed. You learn something from that experience to protect you from having like experiences in the future. For example, if a dog bit you five years ago, how would you react to a dog snarling at you today? There is a good chance you would be scared of being bitten again. You have learnt something from the first experience (don't trust dogs, dogs can bite), have generalised (blaming all dogs) and have installed a protective behaviour (fear, avoidance of dogs) to ensure you remain safe. Even though you were bitten five years ago, the memory is still current and protects you from similar experiences.

Because experiences have a large impact on a child, it is important that parents ensure the programming is as positive as possible.

Sometimes parents unknowingly program bad experiences through the way they treat their children. These experiences are often programmed without the parents knowledge. For example, quite often the first born can experience problems when the second child is born. The first has had all the attention for a couple of years and on arrival, the second now tends to attract a lot of attention. The first child can feel rejected and not as good as the second. Not wanting to feel this way it then seeks attention, needs to prove itself and craves love. This then becomes the way the first child thinks in life. They seek what makes them feel good.

While the child feels insecure, the parents may have no idea that it is feeling that way. The parents have done their best to ensure the first child still has plenty of love and receives lots of attention. The fact is, the first child perceives he received more attention before the birth of the second child than after.

As young children do not possess the ability to analyse, any negatives they experience can have a marked effect. After eight to ten years of age they have more understanding of why things happen, as more information has been programmed. If parents were to go on a holiday and leave their children at home, a two year old would handle the situation differently to a twelve year old or a twenty year old.

The most important thing to remember is

The way you think and act is learned.

It is programmed by you. While others may have had a say, it is you who has taken it on board. What makes you happy, sad, angry, successful and fearful are all programmed.

*If you are not happy with the way you feel
all you have to do is change the program.*

The rest of this book examines how to do this.

Your Insecurities Hold You Back

Most people have problems because of low self esteem. These problems include depression, anxiety, anger, suicidal tendencies, drugs, alcohol, rejection, jealousy, possessiveness, poor performance (like sport, sexually or at work) and relationship problems. The level of your self esteem determines how well you are able to deal with problems that arise.

In Figure 1, 100% represents absolute bliss while 0% is rock bottom.

When things go wrong in life, people generally head towards 0%. The distance they travel

depends on the size of the stress: the greater the stress, the lower they sink.

Every person has an inner need to feel secure, to be at 100%.

When you feel insecure or stressed out you are heading towards 0% which produces emotional pain. The lower you go the more pain you feel. Two of the biggest pain producers are a relationship break up and the death of a loved one - both producing feelings of devastation. As nobody likes emotional pain, you have to turn it around in some way ... and quickly.

The moment something goes wrong in your life (and it invariably will), you have a number of options available to you. You can:

1. do nothing,
2. live in hope things will change,
3. blame others,
4. change others,
5. seek attention,
6. compensate by doing something or taking something to make you feel better,
7. deal with the problem.

Let us examine these options in more detail.

1. Do Nothing

Failure to do anything or find a satisfactory solution can mean you continue to suffer and may even begin to slide further towards 0%.

This feeling of going nowhere can quickly bring on a feeling of depression, which means there is no outcome, no solution. You hit a brick wall with nowhere to go, you end up in a black hole with no way out, you continue to go around in circles or mark time. When I ask a client suffering from depression "What is the solution to your problem?" they commonly reply "There isn't one" or "I can't see any".

Not being able to find a solution generally means the person will continue to suffer in some way. Let us take Jan, who was having another bad morning. Her three year old was continually grumbling while the older two young children were misbehaving while getting ready for school. Jan was tired of telling them what to do and having them disobey her. While running around attempting to get everything done, Jan quickly came to the end of her tether. In pure frustration she screamed at her children "You're driving me nuts".

Quite often one hears a term like this which indicates a person is losing control. They may even think they are going mad.

I recently heard a good definition of insanity from a friend: Doing the same thing over and over and expecting (or hoping for) a different result.

Exercise: In what areas of your life do you feel you are going mad? Where are you doing the same things over and over hoping things will work out differently? Is it with children, family or work? List these areas now, because once they are identified your mind begins to work on a solution.

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You may say "There is no solution to my problem". There is. Every problem has a solution. I am yet to find a problem that does not have a solution. Can you think of a solution to help Jan?

To show how complex, or easy, solutions can be, complete the following:

There are 9 dots in the diagram in Figure 2. Take a pen and join all the dots with four straight lines without the pen leaving the page. Remember, you can only draw four straight lines and the pen has to stay on the paper at all times.

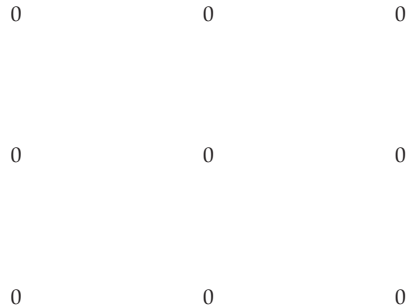


Figure 2.

How often have you attempted to find the answer through working within the dots? To give you a clue, the solution lies outside the dots.

The more you try something without success, the greater the frustration. Most people continue to hope for a new solution through doing the same old things. They continue to seek the solution within the dots, even though it cannot be done.

People will only move on when there is a need. If the need is not there they continue to do the same old things. An example of this are smokers who say they should quit because it is affecting their health. They will admit cigarettes are making them sick, yet they are reluctant to do anything about it. They will even comment "I know I should give them away as they are killing me". The need to smoke outweighs the need to give up. It is only when a doctor warns them they will die within 12 months if they continue to smoke does the need to quit become greater than the need to smoke. They then create the action to quit. Fear is a pretty good motivator!

You may continue to suffer until you reach a point where you believe the suffering is not worth it. At this point you decide to do something.

If you fail to do anything, you can repeat the same old things without finding a solution. The eventual effect of this on your mind and body is similar to a pot stewing. Through holding in the emotion, your "blood boils" so you may experience symptoms where the skin erupts producing rashes, eczema or ulcers. You may also experience constant tiredness, headaches, migraines, temper tantrums and a painful neck and back, as the body attempts to deal with this pent-up emotion.

2. Live In Hope

When you feel stressed, one option is to rely on others to alleviate this stress. Great if it happens, bad if it doesn't. Many people believe it is easier to have others to fix a problem than it is for themselves.

If you live in the hope of things changing, you may wait a long time. When you wait for an outcome, you are not in control. It is like waiting for a bus. You don't determine when it will arrive. You can only sit and hope it is on time. If it isn't, you may become frustrated or agitated which means the arrival time of the bus determines how you feel. When you live in hope that

things will change, you continue to suffer until the desired outcome arrives. This can take hours, days, months and even years.

If you dislike suffering for some undefined length of time, take back the control and do something about your problem. Seek a solution that is beneficial to everyone.

3. Blame Others

One of the most common forms of dealing with emotional pain is to blame someone else for the problem and rely on them to fix it. The phrase "It's their fault I feel this way" means that another person is creating the problem, so they have to fix it for you to feel good.

If they fix it, great. If they do not, you continue to suffer until they do. And, as we know, you cannot always rely on someone else to do the right thing by you. The only person you can rely on is ... yourself.

4. Change Others

Another way of solving a problem is to change others so they agree with you. Most people believe it is far easier to change someone else than to change themselves.

To make themselves feel better, people will:

(i) Manipulate or control others. When you feel out of control, you can try to control others so you feel in control. This may occur physically, verbally or both. While others do what you want, you think you are in control. For example, you set out to have the other person agree with you. What may start out as a discussion can quickly move to yelling followed by fighting or even death. All in the name of control, where one person is trying to prove they are right and the other is wrong.

While you have to control others,
you are not in control of yourself.

(ii) Degrade others. If you feel out of control you can degrade others in the hope they will change to suit you. Through degradation you are putting someone down to make yourself feel better ... for a time at least.

(iii) Making others feel guilty. This involves making other people feel guilty in some way to change them. This can occur within a relationship where one partner makes the other partner feel bad to get what they want. It also occurs with parents putting the guilts onto their children. "I spent all this time and money on you so you have to ... (do this for me)".

5. Seek Attention

When people feel insecure, especially children, they can seek attention. This may involve being the life of the party, the class clown or doing something they know is wrong. Quite often a child's misbehaviour can be for attention seeking reasons.

6. Compensate

You learn to deal with stress in your own way. Unresolved stress is a build up of emotion that can lead to "stewing" on things. As this only makes you feel worse, you may compensate to make yourself feel better. You need to do something to feel in control and secure. Compensating can take the form of:

(i) Taking prescribed **drugs** (like Valium and Prozac) or recreational drugs like marijuana, heroin, speed or ecstasy. Ask a drug user what benefits they receive from taking the drug and the response is generally "None". Ask how the drug makes them feel and they respond with such

words as “relaxed”, “confident”, “in control” and “secure”. Ask under what circumstances they take the drug and some general replies are “when stressed out”, “after work” and “when others get together and do it”. All these represent benefits to the drug taker.

*Everything we do in life through our own free will
is because we gain a benefit from it.
If we don't gain a benefit, we don't do it.*

(ii) **Alcohol.** This is often called “Dutch courage” because it takes away inhibitions and gives a person confidence. When taken to excess it can make problems disappear ... until the person wakes up in the morning! It can, and often does, bring out the worst in people. Many, especially males, want to fight to prove themselves in some way. The local newspaper on a Monday morning contains many articles relating to “drunken louts” and incidents that have occurred over the weekend because of alcohol.

(iii) **Cigarettes.** Most cigarette smokers say they smoke when they have nothing to do (boredom), when they need a “pick-me-up”, when they want to relax or when they worry, are upset, angry or stressed. The purpose of the cigarette is to make them feel better in some way. Thus, they become dependent on the “crutch”. On giving up, many people complain of putting on weight. All they have done is simply dropped one crutch (smoking) and replaced it with another (over-eating).

(iv) **Food.** People tend to over-eat to make themselves feel better. It may be to overcome boredom or stress. Food becomes a comforter. The problem is, it does not do much for the waist line.

(v) **Caffeine.** Many become dependent on caffeine to give them a lift. As one client put it “Caffeine gets me through the day”. Without the caffeine this person suffers.

(vi) **Shopping.** Many people who feel stressed are able to alleviate the stress by shopping. They feel great through buying new clothes, “big boy toys” or something for their home. They feel even better when they are spending their spouse’s money - especially if the spouse is the cause of the stress!

(vii) **Sex.** Some people feel better through constantly wanting to have sex. It can make them feel loved and accepted and alleviates the stress (for example, of not being good enough). I remember a lady who wanted to give up smoking. She indicated she needed a crutch to cope, so we discussed the possibility of a positive one. She said with a smile “The cigarettes are killing me, I don’t want to over-eat and put on weight, I currently drink too much coffee, my credit cards are already full from shopping so the only crutch left is sex. My boyfriend will be pleased”!

(viii) **Gambling.** People who have a gambling problem say they feel a whole lot better when they win. The problem is, they generally lose more than they win, so the stakes continually become higher. Gamblers live in hope of getting that one big win to end all their financial worries. When they do win, they punt it all in the hope of building on their winnings.

The “down side” to compensations is they are seldom good for you, physically or mentally. When one wakes in the morning, the stress is still there. So you go through the same routine of compensating for the unresolved stress, which continues to build and a point may be reached where the usual compensation is no longer having the desired effect. When a substance ceases to alleviate stress, the person has to “up the ante”. The substance has to be taken more often or a stronger dose or product is required. Addiction now takes a stronghold as the mind says “I depend on this product to feel good”.

While people verbalise how they want to get rid of their crutch, some find it nearly impossible to do so. The crutch serves a great purpose in helping them deal with their stress and it becomes a necessity. It is their only coping mechanism. It is important to alleviate the stress first as it then becomes easier to give up the crutch. Take away the crutch without dealing with the stress and the person will not cope. They will either suffer withdrawal symptoms, want the product back

(craving) or will search for another crutch to help alleviate the stress.

Exercise: Identify how you deal with your stresses and problems. Do you internalise them and hope they disappear or do you compensate in some way? Do you endeavour to put the stress onto someone else?

The first step to moving ahead is to identify how you handle stress and problems. If a change is needed, you can then make it.

Deal With The Problem

The last way of overcoming stress, which produces a long term result, is to deal with the stress through your own thinking. What stresses one person may not stress another, the reason being both have a different attitude.

Your own thinking can lift you or drop you. Through learning to control how you feel, through positive thinking and viewing the stresses in life as a challenge, you can live a life at 100% (in Figure 1). It means going outside the 9 dots for the solution (Figure 3). [Solution given in the book!]

Remember, you always have a choice as to how you sort out any problems you experience in life.

Chapter 2 covers "How to move forward".

To purchase your copy of Empower Yourself: a Practical Guide to Building Self Esteem, go to www.clivemurphy.com and go into "Products"