

Developing Self Confidence, Self Esteem and Resilience

Explore and better understand the nature of resilience and how to develop and foster better self awareness, self confidence and self esteem.

**Presented by RMIT Counselling
Service**



Session Outline:

- What do we mean by self confidence and self esteem?
- How is self-esteem built & destroyed
- The Effects of High and Low Self-Esteem and the dangers of poor self esteem
- Improving your self esteem:
 - The Pathological Critic
 - Disarming the Critic – Developing a Healthy Voice
 - Making an accurate self assessment
 - Developing compassion
 - Perfectionism and shoulds
 - Healthy vs. unhealthy values
 - Reacting and responding well to criticism
 - Taking compliments
- Resilience
- Developing resilience:
 - Flexibility
 - Behaviours (Actions speak louder...)
- Resilient thoughts
- How to bounce back
- Creating resilient relationships

What do we mean by self confidence and self esteem?

- **Self confidence:** The belief that you can achieve success and competence. In other words – believing yourself to be capable. Self-confidence might be in reference to specific tasks or a more wide ranging attitude you hold about your abilities in life.
- **Self esteem:** Your opinion of your self and your worth. In other words, your perception of your *value* as a person, particularly with regard to the work you do, your status, achievements, purpose in life, your perceived place in the social order, potential for success, strengths and weaknesses; how you relate to others and your ability to stand on your own feet.

What is the difference between self confidence and self esteem?

- Both self confidence and self esteem relate to your perception of yourself, the former relates to your perception of your abilities and the latter relates to your perception of your worth or value.
- Both concepts are closely related and those with low self confidence will often have low self esteem and vice versa.
- For the sake of simplicity, these terms will be used interchangeably throughout this workshop.

Self-Esteem...What's it made of?

- Your self-esteem is made up of all the experiences and interpersonal relationships you've had in your life. Everyone you've ever met has added to or taken away from how you see yourself!



How is self-esteem built & destroyed.

Built

- Having a good role model.
- Praise & compliments.
- Focusing on the positive.
- Keeping criticism to a minimum.
- Setting & achieving goals.
- Positive self talk.
- Physical Activity.
- Forgive one's self for past mistakes.
- Practice your talents or skills.
- Learn new things.
- Plenty of rest and relaxation.

Destroyed

- Comparing yourself to others.
- Negative role models
- Putting yourself down (negative self talk / criticism).
- Put downs from others, especially significant others.
- Underestimating your capabilities.
- Having perfectionistic expectations of yourself.
- Constant failure.
- Relationship breakdowns.
- Poor diet, lack of exercise, poor sleeping habits.

The Effects of High Self-Esteem.

People with high self-esteem possess the following characteristics:

- They like to meet new people.
- They don't worry about how others will judge them.
- They have the courage to express themselves.
- Their lives are enriched with each new encounter.
- They are nicer to be around.
- Their ideas are met with interest because others want to hear what they have to say.
- They make good leaders!
- They appreciate life and are willing to try new things - they are magnets to positive opportunities!
- Have less mental health problems



People with high self-esteem have an **“I think I can”** attitude!

The Effects of Low Self-Esteem

People with low self-esteem possess the following characteristics:

- They don't believe in themselves.
- They see themselves failing before they begin.
- They have a hard time forgiving their mistakes and make themselves pay the price forever.
- They believe they can never be as good as they should be or as others.
- They are afraid to show their creativity because they will be ridiculed.
- They are dissatisfied with their lives.
- They spend most of their time alone.
- They complain and criticize.
- They worry about everything and do nothing.
- Have more incidences of mental health issues like depression, stress and anxiety.

People with low self-esteem have an **“I can't do it”** attitude.



What are the dangers of poor self esteem?

- Self esteem is **essential for psychological survival**. Without some measure of self worth, life can be extremely painful.
- As humans we have the capacity to form judgements – we decide who we are (our identity) and whether we like that person. If we don't, we limit ourselves in life in an effort to avoid further negative judgement from others.
- Your own value of yourself dictates how others perceive you too - you are much less likely to be seen as valuable or capable by others if you don't believe this about yourself.
- Buddhists classify low self-esteem as "a negative emotion or delusion, which exaggerates one's limitations in capacity, quality and potential for growth".
- Having poor esteem can result in feeling out of control and feeling like a victim - ignored, excluded, unimportant, insignificant and unloved.
- Poor self esteem can lead to internalising the criticism of others (taking it to heart) while searching constantly for elusive acknowledgment. This can lead to chronic pleasing and giving others too much power to determine how we feel. This in turn can lead to being a doormat for other people's benefit.

Two kinds of self esteem problems

- Issues with self esteem can be broadly defined as either situational or characterological.
- **Situational self esteem problems** usually only exist in certain situations (public speaking, establishing relationships, at work). For example, someone might see themselves as a good friend and conversationalist, but expect to fail in work situations. Another might see themselves as socially inept but a strong and capable professional.
- **Characterological self esteem problems** are more global (across all situations) and probably began early in life. This a problem of negative self identity and negative thoughts about oneself that can be difficult to let go of, especially if they have been held for a long time.
- However, both situational and characterological self esteem issues can improve – everyone can learn to develop better self esteem and therefore improve their success and happiness in life!

Self esteem quiz

- I have trouble accepting myself as I am T / F
 - I desperately want to change the way I look T / F
 - I think more about my failures than my successes T / F
 - I worry a lot that people would not like me if they really knew me T / F
 - I feel that everyone is much more competent and confident than me T / F
 - I almost always avoid taking on new challenges T / F
 - I am uncomfortable around successful people T / F
 - I avoid making mistakes at all costs T / F
 - I worry a lot that I am ineffective and incompetent T / F
 - I feel worthless T / F
-
- The more true answers you give the lower your self esteem.
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- **This self-esteem questionnaire comes from *Improve your Self-esteem (Dr Andrew Page and Cindy Page 1995)*.**

Discussion in pairs: How much do you believe in your self?

- On a piece of paper write down the percentage of how much you believe in yourself. 100%? 75%? 50%?
- What are you achieving with that percentage?
- What would happen if you believed in yourself 25% more?

Dreams and self belief are free. You can take all you want and walk away!

'You become what you think about'

– Earl Nightingale

- To use a gardening analogy, thoughts are seeds while our mind is a garden.
- Given the right conditions, the earth will grow anything - nourishing food or poison.
- Our minds grow the thoughts (the 'thinking seeds') we entertain. Our mind cultivates them and gives them nutrients and sustenance. These 'thinking seeds' ultimately determine who we become, how we deal with issues, how we solve problems and what we think of ourselves.



- The challenge then becomes how to sow the right 'thinking seeds'.

The Pathological Critic.

- We all have a negative inner voice that attacks and judges us – the pathological critic.
- The critic blames you when things go wrong, compares you to others and finds you lacking. It sets impossible standards of perfection and then beats you up for the smallest mistake and reminds you of all your failures (never your successes).



– The critic is born to help you figure out the world and tell the difference between good and bad, but can quickly become a kind of psychological jackal who steals any good feelings you have about yourself and is the enemy of good self esteem.

– We tend to listen to our critic voice because it is coming from inside us, is familiar and seems to make sense. We also feel a strong need to do right and feel right and the critic can seem to be guiding us towards that goal.

- What does your critic say to you? In your notebook, jot down a list of the familiar criticisms your critic attacks you with.

Disarming the Critic – Developing a Healthy Voice.

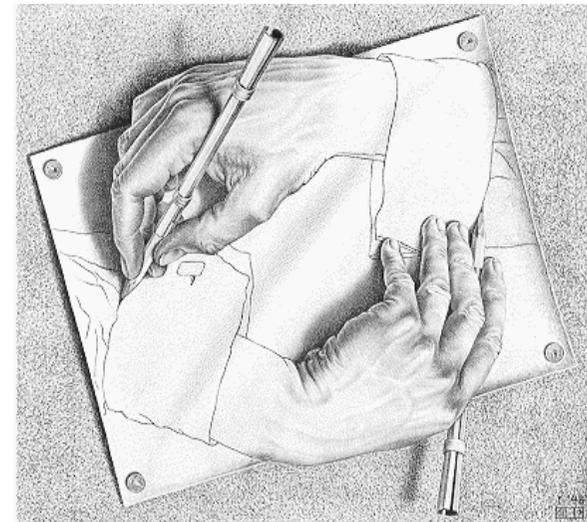
- Talk back to your critic! You don't have to believe these negative things about yourself.
- You can do this in several ways:
 - Get angry, think “Stop it!” or “No more put downs”
 - Ask yourself the price of believing these criticisms (on your work, your relationships, your level of well being) – are you prepared to keep paying the price?
 - Affirm your worth to counter the critic. This can be hard to do if you are used to thinking about negative things about yourself. Give yourself the task of noticing what you do well, the good moments you have and pay attention to these.
 - Remind yourself of the illusion of the critic – criticising yourself doesn't motivate you to do better, it just makes you feel so bad that you can't do anything. Also, anticipating rejection and failure doesn't make it any easier to cope with it if it happens – it just makes you feel bad before and after.

Real self/Ideal Self exercise

- On your sheet of paper, draw a symbol or picture anywhere on the page that represents your “real self” – the way you currently see yourself.
- Alongside this image of your real self, add some descriptive words that you would use to capture what you think of the way you are. If you are having trouble coming up with words, you can use the “Self concept inventory” below as a guide:

Self concept inventory: ‘what do you think of...?’

1. Your physical appearance.
2. How you relate to others.
3. Your personality.
4. How other people see you.
5. Your performance at school or on the job.
6. Your performance of the daily tasks of life.
7. Your mental functioning (problem solving, reasoning, capacity for learning and creativity, wisdom, insight etc).



Real self/Ideal Self exercise.

- Now on the same page, draw your ideal self – the way you would like to be or you wish you were.
- Alongside this image of your ideal self, add some descriptive words that you would use to capture what you think of the ideal version of yourself. (Again, you may use the categories in the “Self concept inventory”)
- **In pairs, discuss your drawing:**
 - How far apart are the real and ideal selves?
 - How reasonable is your assessment of your real self?
 - What was the tone of the descriptors in your representation of your real self – mainly positive or negative?
 - How achievable are the expectations for your ideal self?

Making an accurate self assessment.

- Poor self esteem can contribute to a somewhat warped self perception – it can make you see only what is wrong with you and none of your good qualities.
- Improving self esteem requires you to make a more realistic self appraisal of your strengths and weaknesses.

Weaknesses:

There is nothing wrong with having faults – we all have a list of ways we wish we could be different. The problem is not having this list, but using it to attack yourself. Think of these 4 guidelines to help you appraise your weaknesses more accurately:

1. **Use non pejorative language** – just describe them simply.
2. **Use accurate language** – don't exaggerate or embellish the negatives.
3. **Use language that is specific rather than general** – eliminate words like everything, always, never, completely etc.
4. **Find expectations or corresponding strengths** – the times when your weakness is not exhibited or a strength you have that compensates for the weakness.



Making an accurate self assessment.

Strengths:

- Give yourself the freedom to blow your own trumpet.
- Don't worry about negative terms like arrogance and ego you have to know what is great about you for others to be able to see it too.



If you are having trouble compiling your list of strengths, think of the following:

- Compliments and positive feedback you have been given.
- Past successes and achievements.
- Difficulties you have overcome.
- Things you care about or that are important to you.
- Things that you are good at, skills you have mastered.

Also:

- Remind yourself of your strengths regularly.
- Actively look for examples where you demonstrate your strengths – notice them.

Developing compassion.

- The essence of self esteem is compassion for yourself.
- This means forgiving yourself when you make a mistake and not having unreasonable or unachievable expectations – practicing kindness towards yourself.
- You can achieve compassion when:
 1. You learn to **understand** why you might make mistakes or bad choices when you do rather than judging yourself for this.
 2. You **accept** who you are and your qualities, positive and negative.
 3. You **forgive** yourself for your flaws and your mistakes.



Best Friends (Helen Reddy).

Would you take better care of yourself?

Would you be kinder to yourself?

Would you be more forgiving of your human imperfections?

If you realized your best friend was yourself?

Who is always with you everywhere?

Who is on your side when others are unfair?

And tell me, who will never let you down in any situation?

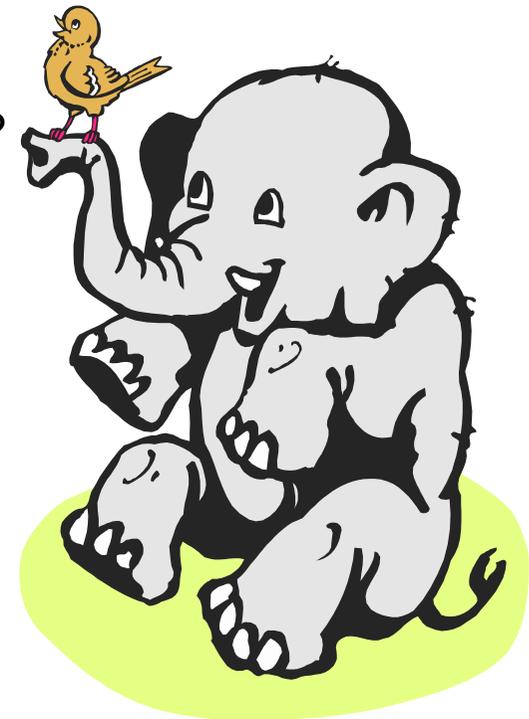
Who will always see you get your share?

And that's why I'm a best friend to myself.

And I take me out whenever I feel low.

And I make my life as happy as a best friend would

I'm as nice to me as anyone I know!



A Compassion Exercise

- Close your eyes and think of an event from your past that you have criticised yourself about.
- Take a few slow and deep breaths, scan your body for any tension and slowly release that tension until you feel relaxed.
- Now go back to that time when your selected event was unfolding. See yourself doing whatever it is that you now regret. See how you were dressed, see the room or the environment, see whoever else was present. Hear any conversation that was taking place and notice any feelings you are having – emotional and physical.
- Now hold that image and ask yourself:
 1. What need was I trying to meet?
 2. What was I thinking at the time?
 3. What kind of pain or feeling was influencing me?
- Now it is time to accept and forgive yourself for who were at that moment in time. Stay focussed on that image of yourself in the middle of the event and say to this person you were:

“I wish this hadn’t happened, but I was trying to meet my needs. I accept myself without judgement. I accept myself at that moment as trying to survive. It is over, I can forgive myself”
- Let this sink in and try to really feel each statement as you practice compassion for yourself.



Perfectionism and shoulds.

- We are guided by the beliefs and values that we hold and these in turn come from our experiences, messages from others and society.
- It is our beliefs and values that generate “shoulds” that we each try to live up to. Some of these are realistic and reasonable, and others are not.
- We can easily end up in a “tyranny of shoulds” – expectations that are impossible to meet (like “I should never make mistakes”).
- Perfection might not be possible but this does not mean we stop striving to grow and develop.



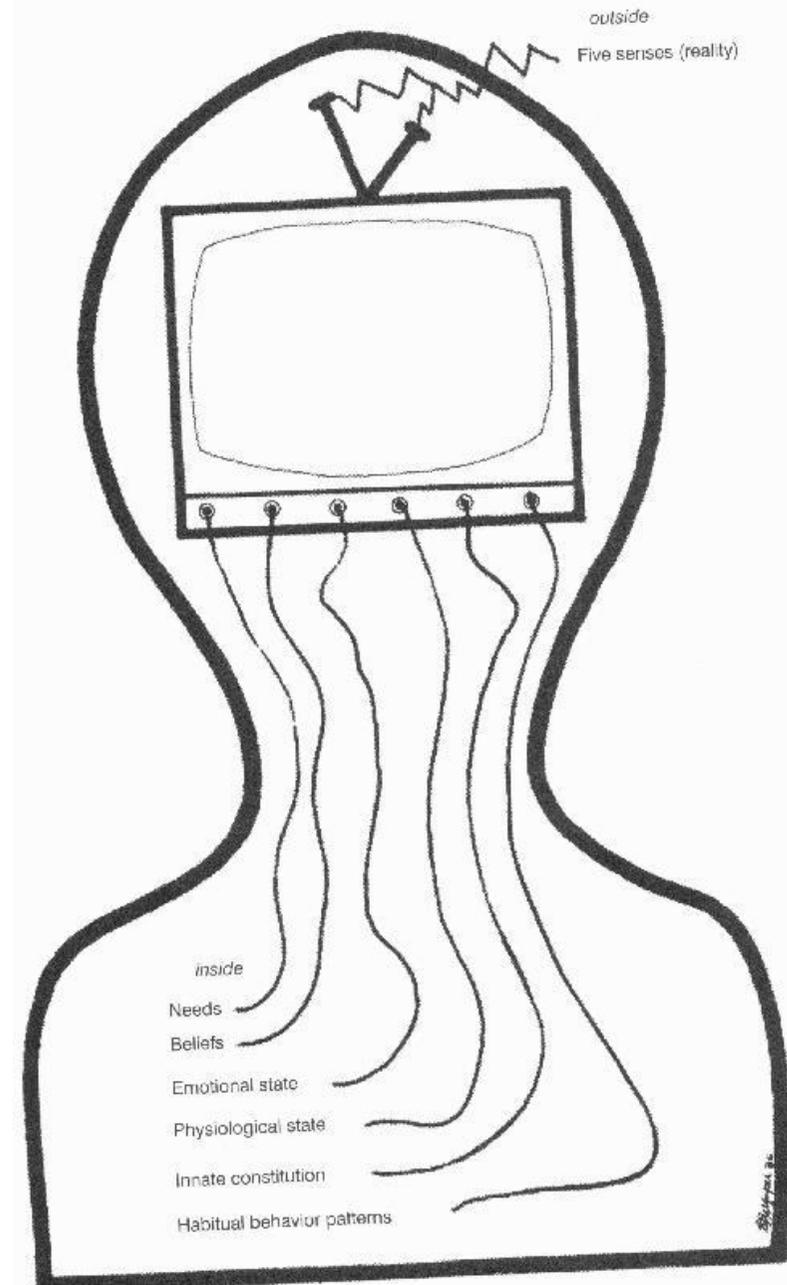
- Remember that we grow up with public figures who appear to be perfect at everything. Heroes are good to look at but they have their problems too.
- Perfectionism is the quickest way to thinking that you are “not good enough”.

Healthy vs. unhealthy values.

- You can tell whether your values, beliefs and/or “shoulds” are healthy by applying the following criteria:
- **Are they flexible?** They should allow for exceptions and should not include words like never, always, all, totally, perfectly.....
- **Have you decided on this value for yourself?** Rather than accepting someone else's expectations at face value without any examination of the relevance or validity for you.
- **Are they realistic?** That is, they are based on an assessment of positive and negative consequences and promote behaviour that leads to positive outcomes.
- **Are they life enhancing rather than life restricting?** This means that your expectations take into account your basic needs as a human being – they should not diminish or narrow you.

Reacting well to criticism.

- The negative opinions of others can be deadly to your self esteem. They say or imply that you are not worthy in some way and you can feel your own opinion of yourself plummet. They give ammunition to your pathological inner critic.
- It is important to realise that we each “screen” reality in our own way – what someone else says about you does not reflect “reality” but rather their perception which comes through their personal “screen”.
- ***Therefore no criticism can be taken at face value.***



Responding to Criticism.

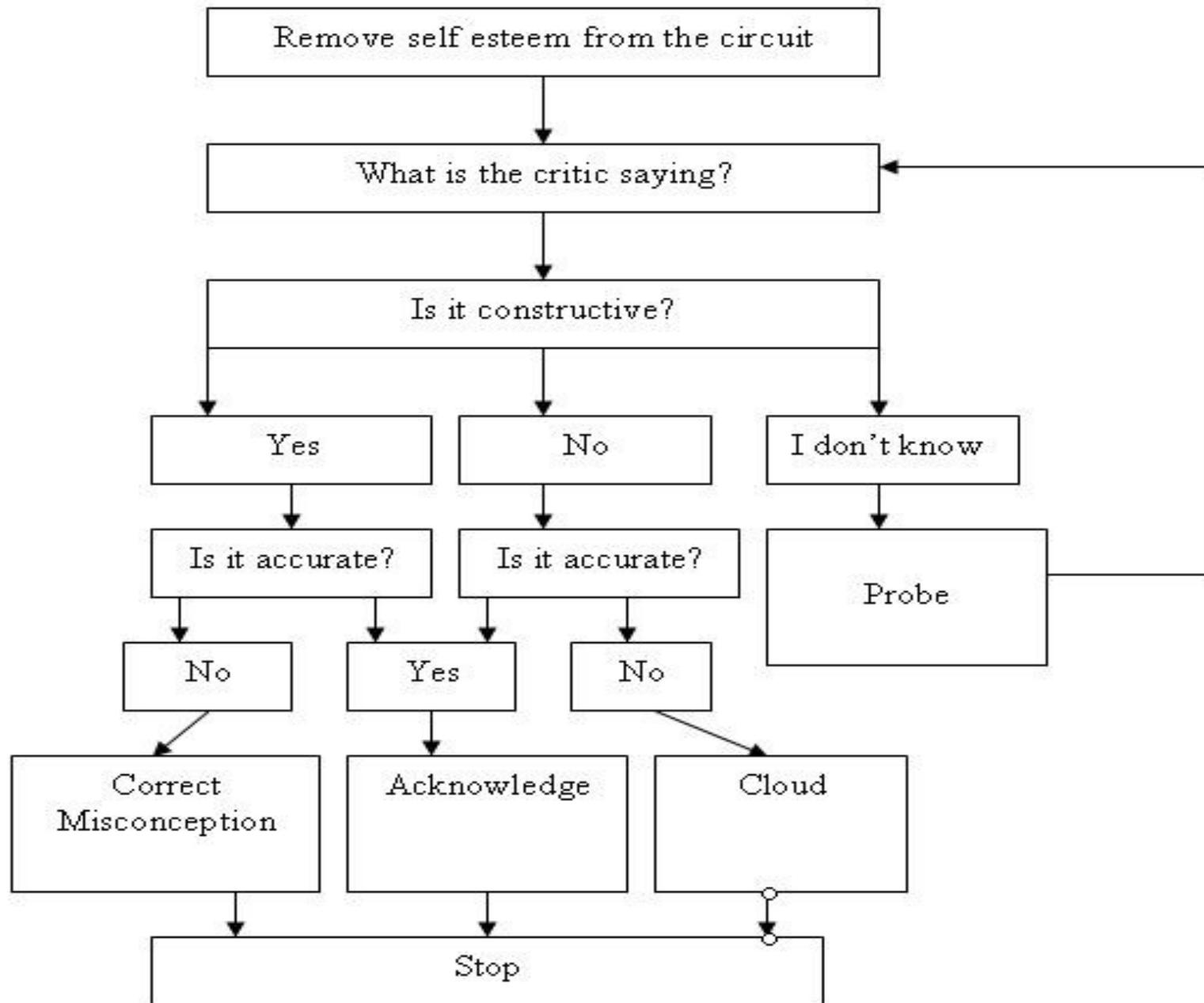
Ineffective response styles

1. **Aggressive response** – counter attack. Gets people off your back, but can easily escalate into an all-out war.
2. **Passive response** – apologise and surrender. Can avoid an argument but means that you surrender to and accept their criticism.
3. **Passive-aggressive response** – respond passively but then use a covert way to react aggressively (get revenge).



Effective response styles - Assertiveness

1. **Acknowledgement** – express your acceptance of the criticism but without apologising or explaining “You’re right, I did do that, thanks for telling me”. This defuses the argument. Use this when the criticism is accurate.
2. **Clouding** – or agreeing in part, acknowledge part of the criticism, for example, the factual part. Use when you agree with the basic facts of the criticism but not the judging tone of it. For example, someone says “You’re not reliable, you were late today” you might say “You’re right, I was late today, sorry about that”.
3. **Probing** – ask questions to get the critic to be more specific about what they are unhappy with. Helps to turn criticism into a meaningful dialog.



Taking compliments.

- Just as it is important to know how to take criticism well, it is also important to be able to take compliments well.
- Just like criticisms, compliments reflect another's perception of you and you may or may not agree. But we can get into the habit of accepting criticisms and rejecting compliments.
- Compliments are important to help us build our own perception of strengths.

Activity:

Face & look at the person next to you. One is “**A**” and the other is “**B**”.

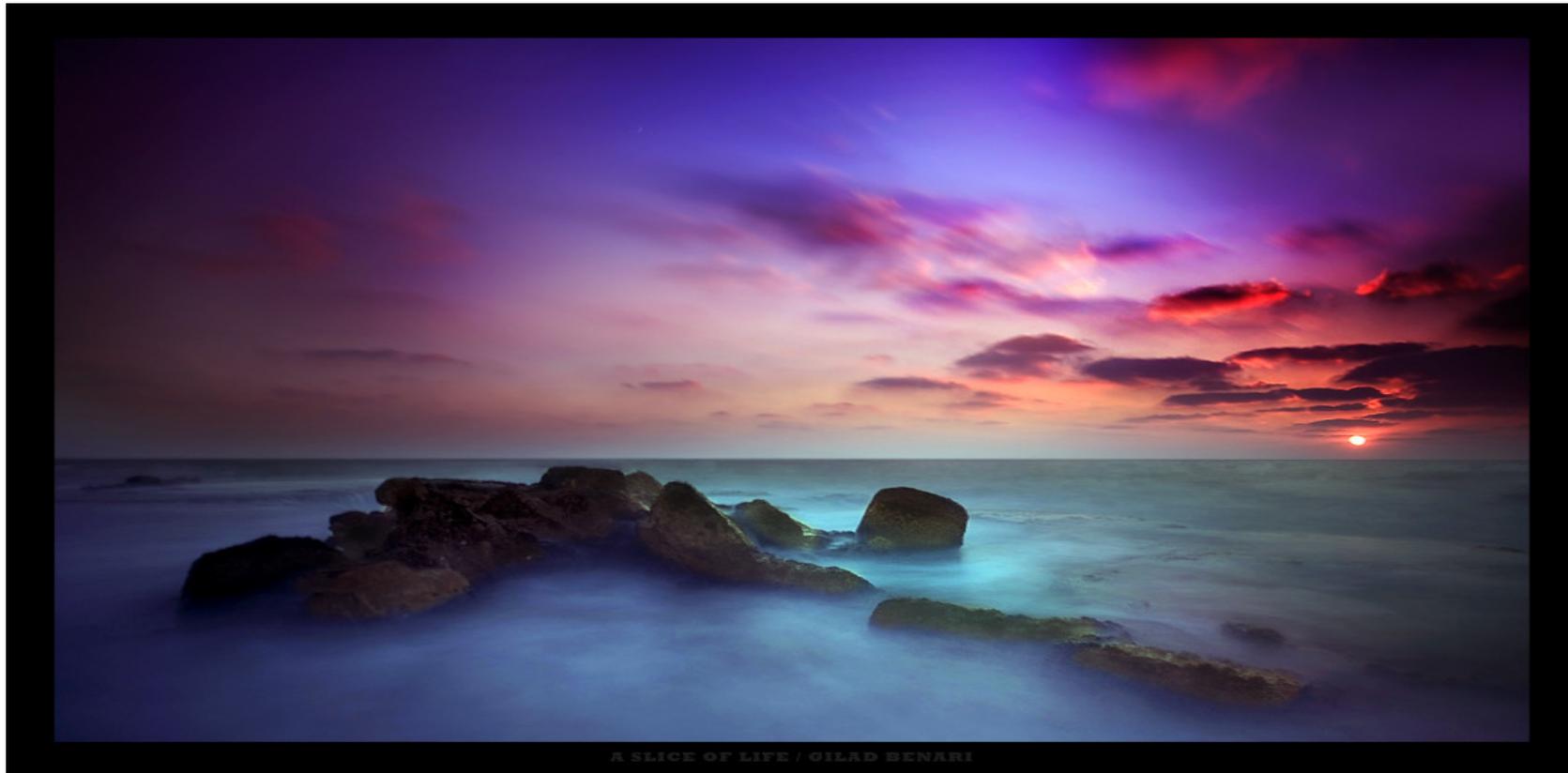
- “**A**” gives “**B**” a compliment – for example, “you are absolutely, undeniably a remarkable person/student/etc”.
- “**B**” responds with “thank you” or “you got that right honey!” (whichever feels most comfortable).
- Reverse it
- What was that like? Giving the compliment? Receiving the compliment?

An activity - “Commercial of Me”.

- On a piece of paper, work out what you would say if you had to create a commercial to “sell yourself”.
- What would you say about yourself? How can you emphasise the positive characteristics and capabilities you have?
- If you want to get creative, you can:
 - Make up the text for a radio or television ad.
 - The slogan for a billboard.
 - The content of a brochure.
- You don’t have to show this to anyone so give yourself complete freedom to say anything!
- Of course – if anyone is willing to share their advertisement – we would love to hear it and applaud your courage in saying it out loud!

Final Thought.

- You are a unique individual. No one else is like you in the whole world. This makes you special already!
- Our time in this world is limited. Make it happen for you so you leave your mark in history!



Resilience.

- Resilience is the personal process of actively and creatively developing survival capacities, learning to repair from harm and being strengthened by facing the adversities of life. An individual's protective understandings of their support, beliefs and behaviours that they develop from their life experiences, determine their level of resilience.
- Most young people will move through multiple careers in their lifetime and many will live in communities without knowing their neighbours and the support of extended family. The development of young people's resilience is more important than ever to manage the rate of change, unpredictability and increased isolation in our communities and the need to function as social beings.



Developing resilience.

- Strength in the face of adversity is one of humankind's most desirable characteristics.
- Challenges and disappointments are an inevitable part of life. Most of us will encounter adversity, in the form of relationship problems, health issues, financial stresses, work worries, and grief or bereavement. Even significant wealth provides no protection against trauma and tragedy. But resilience does.
- Resilience is increasingly being pinpointed by psychologists as one of the keys to satisfaction in life. It maximises performance, improves physical health, prevents depression and enhances relationships. Developing resilience helps us to face the great challenges of life: those that arrive without warning and those that we believe will happen to someone else. It also safeguards us against ongoing difficulties.

To develop resiliency:

- Build and maintain supportive and positive relationships.
- Develop the capacity to make and implement realistic plans.
- Evaluate and affirm strengths and abilities.
- Enrich skills in communication and problem solving.
- Learn greater self-control to manage strong feelings and impulses.



Some actions you can take to build resiliency:

- Become part of a civic group. You might meet people with common perspectives and experiences.
- Assist others in time of need. You will gain the benefit of learning what others need and what you may need during difficult times.
- Do a perspective audit. Take a look at the positive elements in a situation and beyond the current challenge.
- Focus on what you can learn. You can't change what is happening to you, but you can change how you respond.
- Measure and manage your goals. Identify the one thing you can do next to further your goals in a situation.



- Identify what is holding you back. Remove the barriers that create unnecessary stress.
- Engage in a supportive, pleasing, nurturing activity. Though it sounds antithetical, you need to relax during stressful situations. Not doing so will make the demands of the situation even greater.
- Meditate and journal. You need to clarify your feelings, reasons for those feelings, and 'work it out' to find the best solution. Reflect on what you did in previous situations that are parallel to the current challenge and use the lessons you learned to overcome the challenge at hand.
- Ask others what they did in similar situations. Learn from their trials and challenges.



Flexibility.

Finally, become more flexible. Flexibility is essential to developing and enriching your resilience. It means keeping your emotions from hijacking your good reason, being able to detach yourself in order to step back and gain perspective, and understanding that your past and your personal qualities are resources to inform your next choice. In short, the greater the resilience, the greater the chances you'll overcome them - and even be rewarded by them.



Behaviours.

- There are two behaviours that the resilient display in abundance, whether in reaction to disappointments or major traumas: emotional control and openness to new experiences.
- The ability to stay calm is one of the key predictors of a successful outcome in the immediate aftermath of an emergency situation. Managing emotion also helps us to build healthy relationships. Express what you feel in words but resist indulging in 'prima donna' behaviour.
- The second behaviour displayed by resilient people is 'openness to new experiences'. It is this skill that enables people to rebuild shattered lives. Strengthen your resilience by doing something new, something that takes you out of your comfort zone: try meeting new people, experiment with a new activity, enhance an existing skill or take on additional responsibility.



Actions speak louder...

- To build resilience, practise solving problems and forming relationships. Resilient people are problem solvers, not victims.
- Become a problem solver. Develop your resilience by taking specific action to resolve some niggling issue, whether it's your partner's behaviour, your parents or general domestic chaos. You do not need a perfect solution. Plan realistic steps and do something regularly, however small, that enables you to move forward on a daily or weekly basis.
- The people who best bounce back from misfortune are also those who are emotionally connected to others. Good relationships build resilience. Strengthen this by assisting others in their time of need, and by learning to accept help and support from those who care about you. Better still, ask loved ones for what you need.



Resilient thoughts.

- Who chooses what you think? Taking control of your thoughts will dramatically improve your strength in the face of adversity. Resilience demands optimism, acceptance, courage, perspective, humour and confidence in your abilities.
- Optimism is a belief in a positive outcome somewhere in the future. It is a clear sense, through the darkest of times, that ‘this too shall pass’. Expect good things to happen. Consistently visualise what you want, rather than worrying about what you fear.
- Practise acceptance in your response to life’s minor frustrations. Imagine your car breaks down on the way to an important business appointment. You have forgotten your vehicle-recovery membership card and your mobile phone battery is dead. Rather than asking “Why me?”, ask “Why not me?”. What are you going to do? The sooner you have the courage and perspective to think; “This has happened and now I must deal with it”, the sooner you start generating solutions.

- Retain a sense of humour at all times and, most of all, nurture confidence in your own abilities. Remind yourself that you are a resourceful and resilient human being, and demonstrate it every day.
- Success and happiness are determined not so much by what happens to us, as by how we respond to what happens to us. Life is a hard teacher. It sends the test first and the lesson afterwards. Resilience requires us to live our lives with grace, humour, courage and optimism. Developing resilience is transformational and life-enhancing. It transforms hardship into challenge; victims into survivors; drama into comedy; failure into success; and helplessness into power. Our resilience makes heroes of us all.



How to bounce back.

- View life's daily challenges as an opportunity to build resilience. Develop skill in handling obstacles such as rudeness, poor service, being delayed, being kept waiting, mislaying keys, disappointments at work and feeling let down.
- Manage your emotions. Throwing a tantrum is not a solution. Instead, try to react to setbacks with grace, humour, courage and optimism.
- Remember that problems are challenges, not impossibilities.
- Ask yourself, "What is the first step towards a solution?" Then do it. Repeat as necessary. All journeys are made one step at a time.
- Ask yourself, "Who can help me?"



- Phoning a friend is always a good option. The task of describing the situation and your feelings about it helps you to keep calm and start generating possible solutions.
- Focus on the positive and keep things in perspective. As in, “This is about a dent in my car, hassle with the insurance, inconvenience and being late. This is not life and death.”
- Maintain a sense of humour. “Three months from now I’ll laugh about being locked out when I was expecting guests.” Why wait?
- Imagine telling the story of your mishap to your friends. The narrative demonstrates your resourcefulness, your sense of humour and your calmness under pressure.
- Take time to reflect and learn from difficulties. Ask yourself, “Knowing what I know now, what would I do differently?”



Creating resilient relationships.

Resilient relationships not only survive, but grow stronger during struggle and adversity. Love is not enough. Many close relationships become casualties of major trauma, such as the death of a child, critical illness or the rape of a partner. The emotional nakedness of personal tragedy shows us who we, and our loved ones, really are. The key to building a resilient relationship is in creating resilience before disaster or tragedy strikes.



Build resilience in the good times by:

- Always talking about what you feel, not just what you think. Grief can be a lonely place. Feelings of anger, guilt and loss, although experienced by both partners, can be isolating and divisive.
- Taking responsibility. Rather than complaining or blaming, seek solutions. “I’d like us to spend more time together. How can we make that happen?” is more effective than “You never make time for me”.
- Managing your emotions. Shouting or being aggressive because you feel stressed doesn’t make the situation better. Resilient relationships are those in which both partners are calm under pressure.
- Learning as a couple. Seek out new friends and challenges.
- Expressing love and appreciation in words, as well as actions. When times get really tough, the silent acts of caring, such as making a cup of tea or taking out the rubbish unasked, are simply not enough.

Resilience Summary:

- **Resilience** involves maintaining flexibility and balance in your life as you deal with stressful circumstances and traumatic events.
- **Letting yourself experience** strong emotions, and also realising when you may need to **avoid experiencing them at times** in order to continue functioning.
- **Stepping forward** to take action, and **also stepping back** to rest.
- **Spending time with others** to gain support and encouragement, and **also nurturing yourself**.
- **Relying on others**, and also **relying on yourself**.



An exercise in resilience: Group Discussion.

- What would you think or feel if the following things happened to you?
 - What is a resilient way of dealing with these situations?
1. You just bought a second hand car and it breaks down.
 2. Your partner leaves you and you find out they have started dating a 'friend'.
 3. You apply for your dream job and get turned down for lack of experience.
 4. You finally get over the swine flu and you come down with food poisoning.
 5. You fail a class and are told you have to appear before a show-cause hearing.
 6. Your mother rings you to tell you the family pet 'scruffy' the dog has been run over and killed.
 7. You leave a late night tutorial to find that someone has stolen your new bike.
 8. You ask someone out on a date and they laugh in your face.
 9. Your mother rings you to tell you how disappointed she is in you for missing your fathers birthday...again.
 10. You spend hours cooking a dish for a dinner party and it burns.

Any questions or comments?

